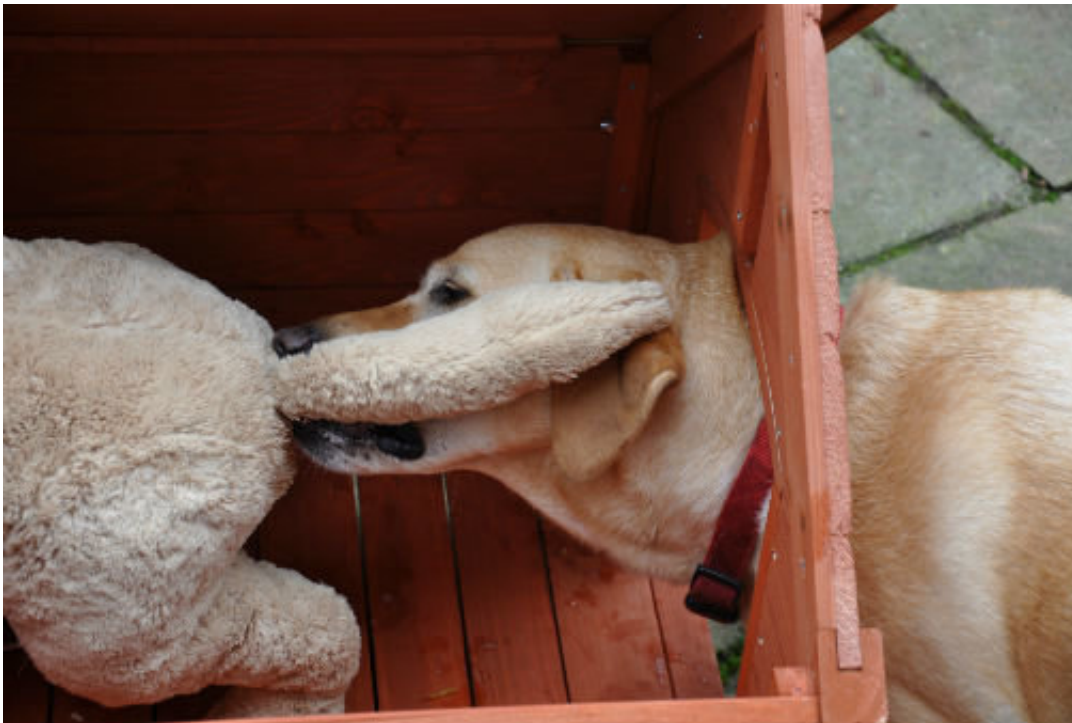


# A keep-fit gadget for your dog this Christmas – who really benefits?

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The 'Dog Internet' project explores how commercial pet technology is not designed with the end-user in mind. Credit: University of York

Researchers at the University of York have enlisted the help of our canine friends to test the concept of a "Dog Internet."

The Dog Internet project explores how commercial pet [technology](#), such as GPS trackers to follow your cat's movement or devices to monitor

how active your dog is, similar to the human 'FitBit', are not designed with the end-user in mind.

Researchers in Interactive Media, at the University's Department of Theatre, Film and Television (TFTV), in collaboration with colleagues at University College Cork and Northumbria University, designed a number of dog technology prototypes to uncover issues in design work and what future inventions could mean to canines.

There are a number of technologies designed for working animals that address specific problems, such as digital devices to allow dogs to assist people with disabilities. There is little research, however, into the growing trend of pet technology designed for leisure purposes.

In a previous study, Dr Kirman and colleagues found that humans are quick to trust such technology, often in place of the advice of expert veterinarians, suggesting that this kind of technology could have risk factors that are not being taken into consideration.

Dr Ben Kirman said: "Our primary concern is for the dogs as end-users, who are often subjected to technology rather than engaging with it in their own terms. Imagine what would happen if a dog could create [digital technology](#) for a human – would we benefit or even understand it?

"To investigate this further we designed prototypes of dog technologies that do not allow human access. For example, the distorted text box that asks the user to prove that you are not a robot by inputting the correct text is one we are all used to, but what if the technology only permitted a dog user and the system had to decide if you were a dog or a human?

"Our starting point with this problem was focusing on the uniqueness of a [dogs'](#) skill-set compared to a human – namely its incredible sense of smell."



Inter-species designs are filled with ethical traps, such as autonomy, consent and privacy. Credit: University of York

## Prototype

The team built a prototype wooden dog kennel, designed to be connected to a network switch, with an interior of a model golden retriever dog. Within the model design, sealed test tubes would contain secretions from various mammals that are squirted out as a fine mist from the hindquarters of the model when a 'user' enters the kennel.

Sensors in the model tail would pick up on the user's behaviour as it sniffs the odour on the model and create a signature that determines the difference between an animal user and a human. A 'real' dog is then authenticated as a digital user.

## Design fiction

Dr Kirman said: "This is an example of a [design](#) fiction, rather than a real system. Although it sounds absurd, it demonstrates the profound challenges of designing technology for the benefit of other species.

"It serves to show the stark contrast between technologies that are designed only for the benefit of the animal and technologies commercially available that are largely based on what humans imagine their pet's need.

"Inter-species designs are filled with ethical traps, such as autonomy, consent and privacy. The Dog Internet project reveals this problem, but in itself is problematic, because the dog won't understand what the internet means.

"Ultimately we hope these designs will open up broader discussions about how we impose technologies on our pets, as well as the regulatory frameworks that are currently lacking."

**More information:** The Dog Internet: Autonomy and Interspecies Design: [figshare.com/articles/The\\_Dog\\_Internet\\_Autonomy\\_and\\_Interspecies\\_Design/4747039](https://figshare.com/articles/The_Dog_Internet_Autonomy_and_Interspecies_Design/4747039)

Provided by University of York

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