

HOW MIGHT WE EXPLORE DESIGN TO IMPROVE OUR UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS PETCARE

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Framing the Question

Pets are part of our everyday life and part of our families. They provide people with companionship but also with emotional support, they can help to reduce stress levels; sense of loneliness and increase social activities.

With that being said pet care is the medical treatment and care of pets which means having total responsibility for their wellbeing. This involves feeding, grooming, recreation, provision of shelter, doctor visits and advanced training to help them grow as pets.

The business of pets represents a huge market in the UK . Statistics show that the UK pet market is one of the largest in Europe. In 2019, the pet care market generated over 2.5 billion pounds and is set to rise to about 7 billion pounds by 2021.(Statista,2020)

Statistically, according to the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) report, in 2020, 51% of UK adults owned pets with 26% of those pets being cats, 24% of those pets being dogs and lastly, 2% of those pets being rabbits. (PDSA,2020)

According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), about 40 pets a day are abandoned across the UK and this is set to rise with further abandonments to happen in the coming months. (RSPCA,2020). Continuous efforts are being made by the RSPCA to find new families for these abandoned pets. This figure

clearly demonstrates that the UK has a problem with its perception of pet care responsibilities.

This is being investigated because people assume that they can leap into buying pets but in reality, there are a lot of background checks that need to be carried out before proceeding to purchase a pet. According to People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), 24% of UK pet owners do not do any research before taking on a new pet and that equates to 5.2 million pet owners. (PDSA,2018). This is the reality and there's definitely a lot of research that needs to be done before taking on a new pet.

The most important factor to look into is the breed of pet which leads to the further consideration of other factors which include your location, family size, experience with pets, compatibility with other pets (if any).

There are two audiences involved as pets are either purchased from pet breeders or adopted from pet shelters depending on what the potential owner wants to do. Adoption from pet shelters is way cheaper than purchasing from a pet breeder so the choice is determined based on the persons' financial stability.

When pets are purchased, they become the responsibility of the owner and are to be fully taken care of at all times. These main responsibilities include their feeding, grooming and recreation. They should never be neglected by any of these.

Pets are domestic animals that are kept for a person's company or for pleasure. Pets often have appeared attractive, intelligent and have relatable personalities to humans. The most common pets are dogs and cats, while some other pets include turtles, rabbits, parrots, hamsters etc.

Pets are more than animals and should be treated that way as they provide both emotional and physical benefits for people. They are beneficial to all ages from young to old and help in various ways. I feel people need to show more value to pets and treat them with a lot more care.

Aims and Objectives

Aim 1: What are the benefits of pets to humans?

Objective: Analyze data through primary and secondary research to know the benefits of pets to humans.

Aim 2: What are the factors that should be considered before purchasing a pet?

Objective: Gather information from online articles to know more about the factors that should be considered in order to purchase a pet.

Aim 3: What are the responsibilities that are related to owning a pet?

Objective 1: Get in touch with pet owners and discuss their experience of being pet owners.

Objective 2: Analyze data through secondary research to know the responsibilities of owning a pet.

Methodology

The findings in this report used qualitative and quantitative research methods. Firstly, the benefits of pets were explored through surveying academic journal articles. Also, benefits of pets to humans were explored through secondary research to back up the findings. The report described steps that should be taken in order to own a pet, differences between adopted and purchased pets and highlighted the influences on pet purchases.

The chosen research methods helped to back up my findings, as it allowed factors leading to the abandonment of pets in the UK to be identified. This report identified the most common pets people purchase, the information provided before the purchase of pets and the advantages and disadvantages of owning pets. This research was aimed at pet owners and pet organisations who are involved in the rehoming of pets. Due to the limitations of the pandemic, visiting the Dogs Trust Organisation was impossible so improvisation had to take place.

This research was conducted through surveys, interviews and journey maps. Conducting interviews and surveys allowed better insight to be gained from pet owners and increased general understanding of the reasons why people purchased pets and what actions people took before purchasing pets. Journey mapping was carried out to visualize the process in which pet owners go through daily with their pets. This allowed empathy towards the report on how pets go through their daily lives based on different lifestyles of their owners.

Preconceptions and assumptions

Pets are treated badly by society, with what pets have gone through both on the internet and in real life is very sad to see and pets deserve way better. People view pets as items that are used for aesthetics but in reality, they feel things the same way humans do.

Often people make impulse purchases of pets due to various reasons and end up abandoning these pets when the responsibilities of owning a pet start to dawn on them. They view it like purchasing an expensive toy from the toy store, but these pets are living things who have feelings, emotions and personalities.

There's a saying from over 40 years ago that goes, "a dog is for life, not just for Christmas". (McEachern .M,2018)

This is because back in 1978, there was a growth in pet shops which meant that people were purchasing dogs impulsively only to go back on their decision and dump these dogs with animal charities. That was very insensitive back then and still is today. Going through the process to make a pet feel welcome into a new family and before they even settled in properly, they get dumped back to the animal charities. To back this up the report will look into existing data research on the awareness of the responsibilities towards pets.

Benefits of Pets

Pets are more than just animals and provide humans with a lot of benefits.

One of the most frequently mentioned benefits of pets is the impact on the health and wellbeing of people. Research shows that people with pets have healthier hearts, rarely stay home sick, make less visits to the doctor, are less depressed and get way more exercise. They also help in lowering blood pressure and regulating the heart rate during stressful situations.

Also, pets improve mental wellbeing of people. Interactions with pets helps to reduce stress and lift up people's moods due to your endorphins (happy hormones) that it releases. That is why pets are sometimes used to provide therapy to people in the hospitals or care homes, they go on to become therapy pets.

This is backed up with a statement from interviewee, Jibodu .T, he stated,

"My pet dog gives me a lot of mental support everyday. Ivy (his dog) makes me feel like a father, so I treat her like my baby and that gives me the responsibility to take care of her at all times. Also, when she obeys my commands it shows that she is progressing in training and this cheers me up." (Jibodu .T,2020)

Pets act as companions and become friends by making owners laugh, cheering them up in difficult times and are always a non-judgemental shoulder to cry on. Furthermore, pets prevent people from feeling lonely, this is because owning a pet comes with certain

responsibilities and these help people to have a daily routine for their pets and allows them to increase their daily interaction and prevents them from feeling isolated.

Bakshi .S opines that he has a strong bond with his cat and they get on really well and he says that his cat demands a lot of attention which he happily gives to his cat. He says his mother was always scared of cats but that was without the experience of actually owning a cat until the pet arrived into the family and she became instantly attached.

As stated by Bakshi .S, he said,

“My cat always keeps me company by playing with me and I see that he is happy when I feed him which gives me joy and according to my religion which is Islam, we should always take care of animals. Bagheera (his cat) feels like my baby. He always wants me to feed him, play with him and give him attention and he is now part of my family.”

(Bakshi .S,2021)

This shows that pets build responsibility in owners as they have to stick to scheduled routines that allows them to be able to manage time appropriately and ensure the pets daily needs are met at the right time without any excuses.

Improved fitness is another indisputable benefit of pets as most pets require daily walks in order to stay healthy and happy. They motivate people to run around with them or

even walk sometimes and this becomes a routine and starts becoming a part of the owners' routine. Pets help to cultivate a healthy habit of running or walking which in the end helps to keep people physically fit.

This is backed up by a statement from one of the survey respondents that says,

“My pet helps me to improve my physical health as I take her for walks twice a day and this helps with my mental health and gives me less stress.”

Pets helps children with their emotional development, as they help children to develop empathy, have higher self-esteem and be more involved in physical and social activities. They also help to teach kids about responsibility from young ages. Research shows that kids love animals, so them having pets from when they are young imparts a lot of skills as they grow older. Most importantly they develop empathy skills which are very important for them later in life.

All this shows that pets are beneficial to all ages and are genuinely the best medicine.

Types of pets people purchase/adopt?

Pets come in all different shapes and sizes but there are pets which are more common than the others.

There are various types of pets out there available to be purchased or adopted. All pets have different breeds which are very different based on different aspects. However, most respondents from the survey own cats and dogs and actually know their breed of pet, which helps with the understanding of their pet in the long run.

With that being said dogs are the most purchased pets, research shows that more than a quarter of people in the UK (26%) own a dog, with an estimated 9 million dogs living in the UK. (1001PetCare,2020). The most common breed dogs in the UK include German shepherds, cocker spaniels, springer spaniels and Labrador retrievers.

Cats are also highly sought after, there are an estimated 8 million cats in the UK, with 5 million of these households owning at least one cat. And, of those households that own a cat, 40% have more than one. (1001PetCare,2020) Cats come in different shapes and sizes but the most popular cats are the Siamese, Bengals and British shorthairs.

Also, rabbits have a high population in the UK, with 2% of Brits owning rabbits.

Research shows that around 1.5 million rabbits are kept as pets in the UK. Rabbits are very intelligent pets and come in various breeds, shapes and sizes. All rabbits have unique personalities and they typically live for between 8 and 12 years.

(1001PetCare,2020)

Indoor birds are also very common pets, they are very interesting and entertaining pets to keep. They are very delicate and should be treated with utmost care. Some species of birds can live for 60 years or longer, so owning a bird needs long-term commitment.

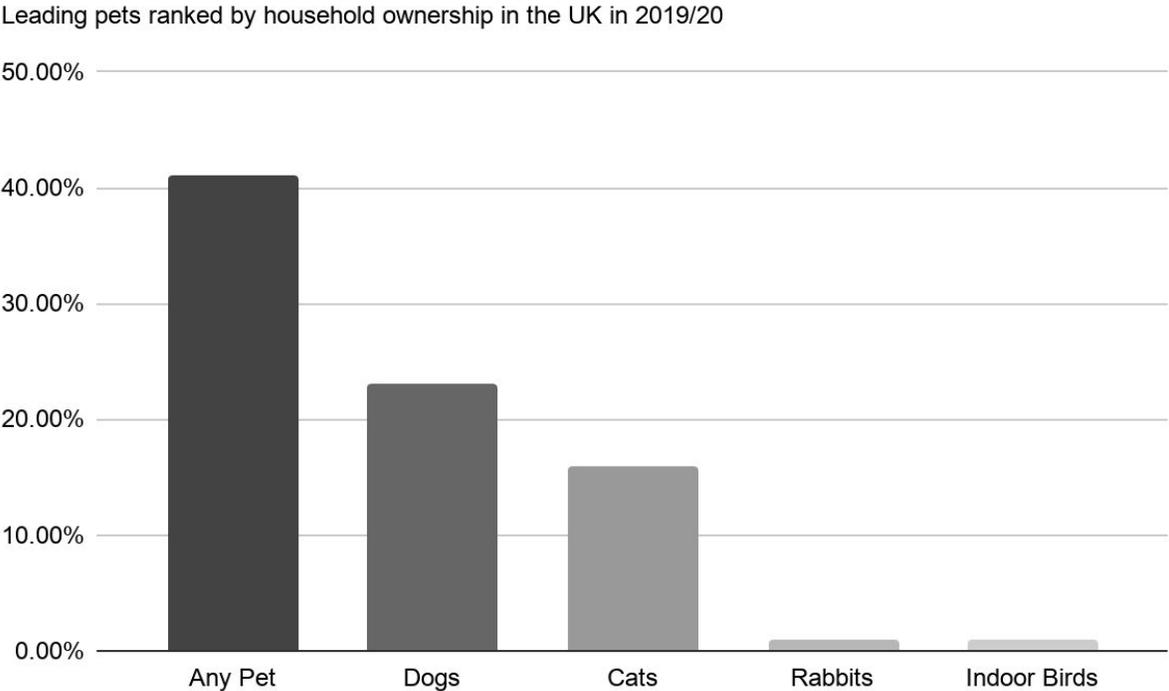


Figure 1: Pets ranked by household ownership in the UK IN 2019/20 (Statista, 2020)

How people choose their pets

Choosing a pet can be fun and exciting but comes with a lot of responsibilities as all pets are different in terms of feeding, cost, care, housing, behaviour and demands on your time spent with them. All pets have different needs and there are factors that should be considered before purchasing a pet.

Most important factor is the current living location of the buyer, whether they live in a house or an apartment affects the pet they purchase, this is because of the size and regulations of the place in which they live. Size is very important because most times pets need playing space and if size is limited that disrupts their recreation and play time.

Also, family size and lifestyle have to be considered, the buyer has to consider if purchasing a pet works for everyone in their family to make sure the whole family is comfortable with living with a pet possibly for the rest of their lives. If the buyer has kids or not acts as a key factor with pets as they love snuggling with kids a lot and go on to be beneficial to the kids in the long run. They have to think if the pet would suit their home and financial lifestyle to make sure they would be able to afford a pet.

Before Bakshi .S got his cat, which he got as a gift he had to check in with his family members to make sure everyone was comfortable with welcoming a cat into their family. Also, he carried out background research to find out more about owning a cat. To defend this he said,

“When I knew I was getting a cat, the first thing I did was do some research on getting a cat, then I told my mum, dad and brother about the cat and they were very fine with it. Then I started to think about living arrangements for the cat and I also had to consider my brother because he has allergies. Also, I go on holidays a lot and I had to think of who would take care of the cat when I am away.” (Bakshi .S,2021)

Experience with pets also affects the type of pet purchased. This is because many people are pet lovers, but not everyone is in the enviable position of being able to own certain pets. For example, someone who has never owned a pet ideally should not have a pet snake as their first pet. This is because pet snakes have different advanced needs based on their breeds. Also, snakes are carnivores which means they only eat meat which as a whole makes your cost of feeding more expensive than your average pet. With regards to pets like dogs, there are starter dogs that are suggested for first time owners to purchase as the responsibilities are easier for new pet owners.

Another key factor that should be paid attention to is the compatibility with other pets (if any). This happens when people want to purchase another pet, they have to consider how their pet(s) will adapt to new entities that have not been in the same shared space before. Some pets go through these transitions with ease, while others tend to have negative reactions which show in their behaviour and this will not be appreciated by the owner.

Pets are just like humans and have various personalities, these personalities are displayed in many ways. Pet personalities are often shown through predictable behaviours from pets', also pets can have attitudes from time to time to show their personalities. Even showing love in special ways or teasing while playing shows a pets' personality. Researchers have learned that pets can exhibit personality traits in similar ways that humans do. For example, dog owners can see happiness in their pets' eyes and tails. Likewise, they can also see the disappointment in their eyes when they do not give the pets what they desire. To conclude, pets are more than just happy or sad and definitely have personalities.

Pet companionship, which is the time in which you spend with your pet should be considered because pets do not like being isolated or left alone. That is why people need to look into their daily schedules to know if they have enough time to be able to have a pet so they can spend adequate time with their pet and improve the relationship between pet and owner. With pet time, there are some pets that are more independent than others and can be left by themselves for a long period of time while there are some pets that require a lot of company and do not like being alone. So, potential pet owners need to know what type of pet best suits their daily lifestyle.

However, some pets seek a lot of attention from their owners and struggle to be independent. This was brought up in a statement via the interview with Jibodu.T when asked about the disadvantages of having a pet, he said,

“My dog has serious separation anxiety and hates being left alone. When she is left alone she can become very disruptive by chewing little bits of the doors and when she does not get any attention she starts to cry until she is tired.” (Jibodu .T,2021)

Pet training is a vital factor to be looked into before purchasing pets because some pets come already trained from the breeders while some are not trained which leaves you with the responsibility to give that pet its basic training. There are benefits of a trained pet including obedience to given instructions, easier pet management and most importantly builds closer bond between the owner and the pet.

Pet grooming involves the care and cleaning of a pet. Potential pet owners need to research about this because grooming needs are different for all types of pets. Some pets should not be bathed, while others might need an occasional wash, others will need to be kept as far away from a bath as possible. This shows how diverse pet grooming can be for potential pet owners. This involves pet health as the wellbeing of the pet is very important. So, owners need to make sure their pets have regular vet checks to make sure their pets are healthy and get advice concerning their pets.

Pet costs should be looked into as they vary based on the pet. Pets range from £5 to £5000 and everything in between and that is only based on purchasing prices. Pets also have day-to-day costs as well which vary based on their sizes and the level of pet insurance covered. Apart from the feeding of pets, healthcare is most likely to be the most regular pet cost, so pet insurance should be looked into as it can make a

difference to your spending towards your pet. Pet insurance is in place to cover veterinary fees for pets, this insurance has different levels that vary in price, so it is the owners' choice to pick the policy that suits them based on their lifestyle.

Jibodu .T, got his dog (Ivy) through his breeder who was his good friend at a good price which he could not reject and that was how his journey as a pet owner.

He went on to say,

"I got Ivy at such a good price that I could not reject, and it is one of the best decisions I've made in my life". (Jibodu .T,2021)

Pet sizes vary as pets are found in all shapes, forms and sizes. Potential pet owners need to know that pets have different size expectations and limitations during their lifespan. This goes back to the pet owners' lifestyle based on where they live, they need to ensure it is a good enough environment for their pet to live in. Their living space needs to be able to accommodate their pet without any inconveniences.

Information about the pets people purchase/adopt?

Pets are purchased/adopted through breeders and rescue homes and when this is done, they are supposedly informed about the pet in which they have chosen. With this being said, the information out there for new pet owners is not enough and they need to be informed more about the factors of owning pets.

There are situations where pet owners are even misinformed about their pets. Bakshi .S was misinformed about the breed and gender of his cat and did not find out until almost six months after.

He went on to say,

“I was told I had a female cat and the vet also told me it was a British shorthair cat. So female cats go through neutering while male cats go through spaying. I booked my cat in to get neutered because I believed I had a female cat. Then I got a call at work to tell me that my cat could not be neutered because my cat was actually a male cat. I was so shocked then I told them to go on with the spaying of my cat.” (Bakshi. S,2021)

This says a lot about how misinformation can mislead pet owners in properly taking care of their pets.

Were you informed about your pets breed before your purchase?

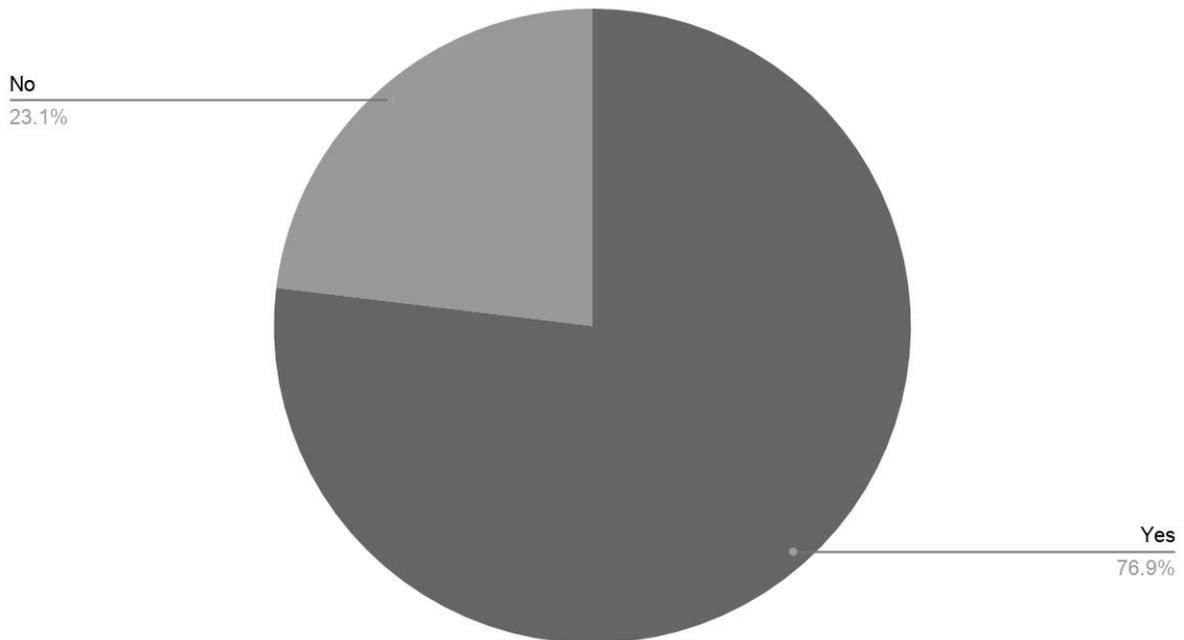


Figure 2: Information about pets before purchase

Further gathered from the survey that the majority of respondents are informed about their pets' breed before purchase. There were comments from respondents requesting for more information from vets other than what is already given to them which is mostly vague.

Adopted pets

Pets are amazing animals but not all are treated very equally. Some pets have awful starts to their lives and the fortunes of others can take a turn for the worst. Most pets in that category find themselves in rescue homes waiting to be placed in new homes.

In an interview with Dr Holland .K, the research officer of the Dogs Trust Organisation we spoke about how many pets get received daily at the rehoming centre? and she stated,

“We do not have daily statistics in a shareable format, but in 2019 we cared for 14,301 stray, abandoned and relinquished dogs at our rehoming centres in the UK and Dublin. We receive a similar number of dogs throughout the year.” (Holland .K.2021)

Adopting these pets gives them a fresh start in life and has a lot of benefits. You do not only get to see them grow in size but most importantly in happiness and confidence.

There are thousands of pets looking to start a new life and the rescue homes make it easier for them to find a new home and relieve them of their past.

This process seems straight forward but rescuing a pet needs commitment and needs to be thought about by the potential pet rescuer to make sure it is the right choice for them. It's best they find what pet suits their daily lifestyle and environment.

Dr Holland .K spoke about the process of rehoming dogs at the Dog Trust Organisation and she said,

“We require our adopters to be an appropriate match for the dogs in our care. Their expectations in a dog and their lifestyle must match the welfare needs of their desired dog. Normally when you want to adopt from us, you’d visit one of our centres and see our dogs. But while normal life is on pause and our rehoming centres aren’t open for public browsing, we’re doing things virtually. We’ve been working closely with DEFRA and other animal organisations to make sure we can keep finding dogs their forever homes despite current restrictions.” (Holland .K, 2021)

There are many assumptions about rescue pets, with the most prominent being that rescue animals can be dangerous but in reality, some of the pets have issues with their behaviours but rescue homes won’t rehome dangerous animals.

This is because rescue homes have the responsibility to rehome safe and healthy animals. So, the pets in the rescue homes get full check-ups at the vets, they also have their behaviours assessed by experts with knowledge of specific breed traits.

All this is done by spending time with the pets, to find out what they are like and what sort of home, lifestyle and environment will be suitable for them. They also decide whether they can live with other pets, and if they are good with children of different ages.

Pet rescue homes are very important to society. Back in 2007 was when the Animal Welfare Act became law in the UK. It is agreed to be the most important piece of animal welfare legislation for nearly 100 years. The act makes it a legal responsibility for a pet owner to care for their pet properly.

Before this law came into action, legal action could only be taken if a pet had suffered from abuse before. Now, experts can prevent pets from going through suffering by being proactive, providing potential owners with guidance before any pet comes to harm.

Purchased pets

Purchasing a pet can be exciting because making the decision to have a pet can be one of the best decisions someone can ever make but this excitement has to come with commitment. This lifelong commitment comes with responsibilities and hard work.

This lifelong commitment is backed up by the survey responses where the minimum time respondents have had their pet for is 6 months while the longest is 22 years. This shows that pets are for a lifetime.

Jibodu .T has a daily routine with this dog Ivy which he has to do for the rest of his life and he says he knew what he was getting into when he purchased his dog and really enjoys the experience.

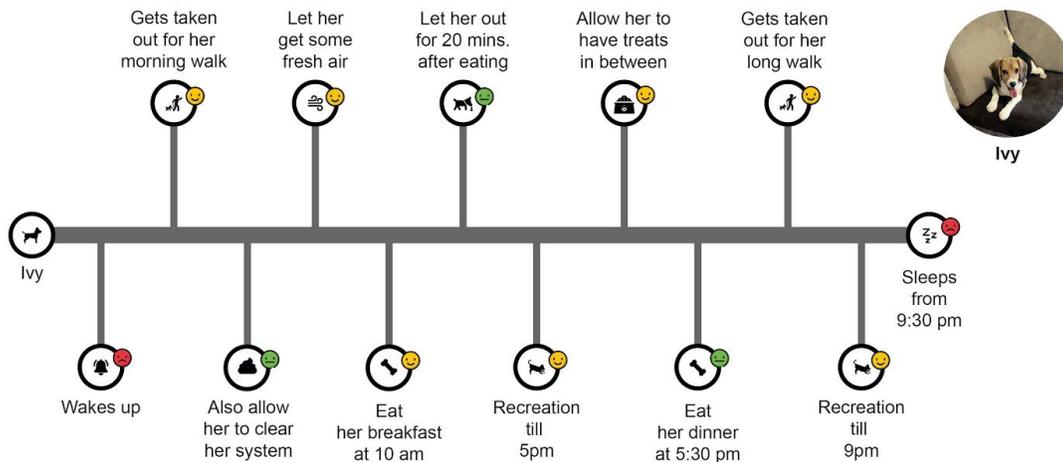


Figure 3: Journey Map for Ivy (Jibodu .T,2021)

There are some background checks that should be done by potential pet owners before going on to buy a pet. Most importantly they should do their research. They should start by carrying out research on breeds and breeders. Being realistic the more time they put into research allows them to gain more knowledge and understanding about the pet they want to purchase. It ends up being worth it because pets are long-term commitments so it's best you know all you can about them.

When a breeder has been located, preferably in your living area the next thing to do is to ask a lot of questions based on your research about the pet. Also, be prepared to

answer questions because a good breeder would be curious to know if you are suitable to take care of the pet.

Next thing is to arrange to meet up, preferably at the pet's home. So, when you see the pet ask more questions based on your previous research, ask about the mum of the pet, this is because it is important to see interaction between the pet and its mum as that is a good sign that it has been bred properly. Also, enquire about the health history of the parents to make sure there are not any hereditary illnesses which can possibly be passed on to the pet.

It is advised that you visit the pet more than once, you should not be pressured to purchase at the first visit. Visit a couple more times to carry out more observation on the pet and if anything does not seem right it is best to walk away from purchasing that pet. All this allows the potential owner to make the right decision towards the pet.

Lastly, there's some important paperwork that you need to ask the breeder about. You need to ask the breeder for proof of any vet checks, vaccinations and microchipping. These are very important, and every good breeder should have all this ready for you.

Abandonment of pets

Pets are amazing creatures but do not always get treated as such, they are often mistreated and end up being abandoned. This abandonment can often be traumatic to pets and can change their behaviours forever.

According to the Dog Trust Organisation, dogs come to them through 3 main sources.

Where pets at the rehoming centre come from

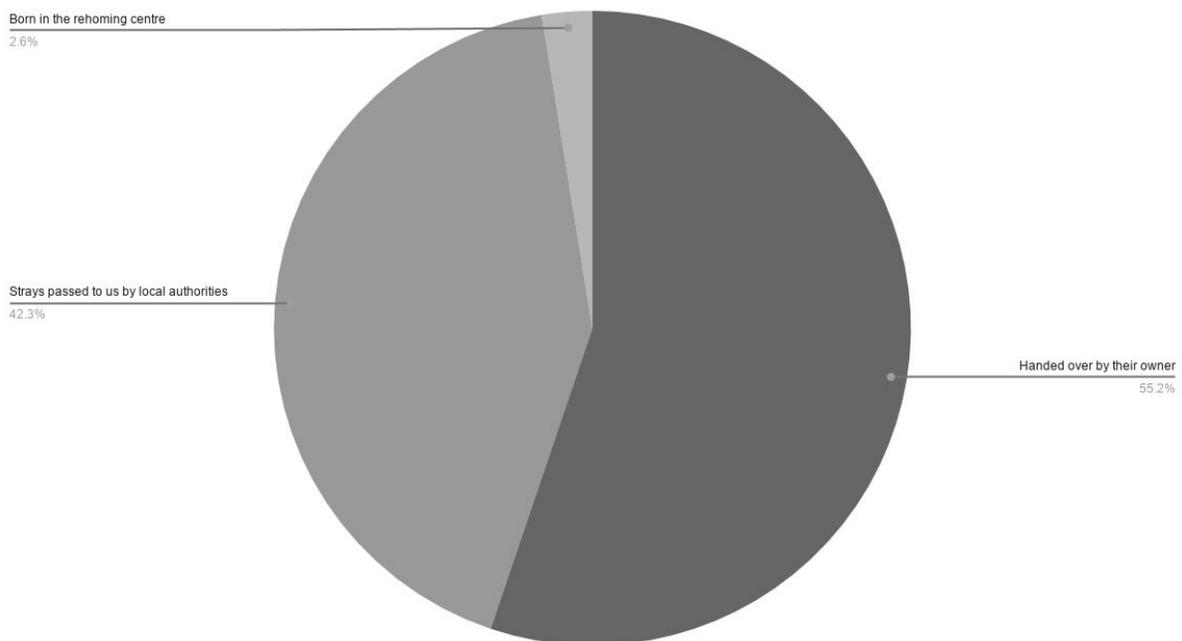


Figure 4: Where pets at the rehoming centre come from (DogTrustFoundation,2021)

There are many reasons why pets are abandoned/surrendered. 33% are based on the dog and its health and behaviour while 66% are based on the owner and circumstances, including health, wealth, work and relationships. (DogTrustFoundation, 2018)

Also, here are the most common reasons why dogs are handed over to the rehoming centre.

Most common reasons why dogs are handed over to the rehoming centre

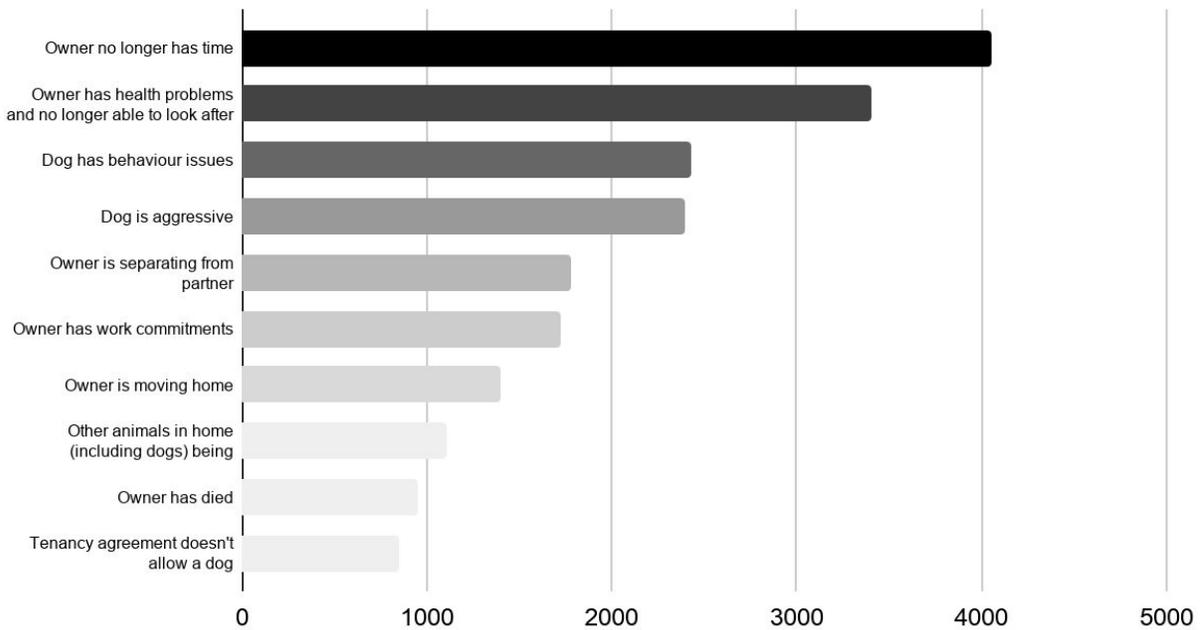


Figure 5: Common reasons why dogs are handed over to the rehoming centre

(DogTrustFoundation,2018)

Influence of movies on petcare

As much as pets are purchased for various reasons, movies have a lot of influence on this decision for pets to be purchased by people. Movies have a lasting impact on pop culture, therefore influencing a lot of things, from the way people dress to the music they listen to and so on.

Movies have a lot of influence on consumers and can lead them to make rash decisions by purchasing pets. Statistics show that movies featuring pets like dogs, owls or guinea pigs tend to increase a breed's popularity for up to ten years to follow, and that demand is based on the success of the movie.

These movies show the pets having huge camera roles and they appear to be very attractive and this tempts viewers to impulse buy.

There are a lot of movies that have had these reactions from viewers based on the success of the movie in the past years. One of these movies was G-Force, this was an American family comedy produced by Walt Disney Pictures and Jerry Bruckheimer Films that released in 2009.



Figure 6: Guinea pigs from G-Force Movie (AvForums,2011)

This movie was about a team of specially trained guinea pigs who were the last line of defence against chaos and destruction.

The target audience for this movie was kids and at that point it was expected that kids would ask their parents for guinea pigs who had been made to look so cool on television but in reality are messy, noisy and are not suitable starter pets for kids as they are too fragile to be kept in the hands of kids.

A quote from the book, "Living with Guinea Pigs" stated that,

"They require a considerable amount of time and care, and are not inexpensive to keep." (The Little Piggy Marketplace, 2010)

So, parents and children were urged to do research before deciding to take on the pet and welcome them into their families.

In the end that was inevitable and there was a surge in the sales of guinea pigs following the release of the movie.

Conclusion

In summary, the data obtained was both positive and negative, leaning more towards the positive to back up the direction of my question that has not changed. The positive information shows that there are a lot of benefits of pets towards humans while the negative shows that there is also a big lack of awareness about the understanding and responsibilities towards pet care and this is for many reasons, mostly ignorance.

The data obtained showed that the majority of pet purchases are impulse buys which end up in regrets or total suffering on the pets end. It was also discovered that there are a lot of influences on the pet market that lead consumers to purchase pets they know nothing about which often does not end well in the long run.

Also, from what the data shows, pets are more beneficial towards humans and help humans more than they believe they do. Pets play a key role in society and should be given more attention should be taken care of with more importance.

There were a lot of trends that were discovered with pets mainly regarding pets being treated like items rather than living animals. Research showed that a high number of pets are purchased during national holidays such as Christmas as gifts without prior research causing the pets to be returned with short notice.

The data obtained led to better understanding of pet care as it was seen from different points of view which included various pet owners, rehoming centre representatives and

even non- pet owners. This helped to view everyone's aspect on how responsible pet care can be improved.

Responsible pet ownership would really help to reduce the rate of pet abandonment in society today and pet research needs to be emphasized more in society to help consumers in choosing the right pets to fit their lifestyle.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you had your pet for?
3. What actions did you take before purchasing your pet?
4. What made you get a pet?
5. What breed is your pet?
6. What made you purchase that breed?
7. Were you informed about the pet you purchased?
8. What are the benefits of your pet to you?
9. What are the disadvantages of your pet to you? (if any)
10. Do you believe there is a gender impact on the pets' people purchase?

Survey Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What's your gender?
3. How long have you had your pet(s) for?
4. Why'd you get a pet?
5. What breed is your pet?
6. What made you purchase this breed?
7. Do you know much about your pets' breed (personality ,habits, behaviour ...)

8. Were you informed about the pet you purchased?
9. What are the benefits of your pet(s) to you?
10. How do you think design can improve the understanding and responsibilities towards pet care?

