

# Awareness and Effects of Animal Shelter vs Pet Breeder Operations in the United States

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## Table of Contents

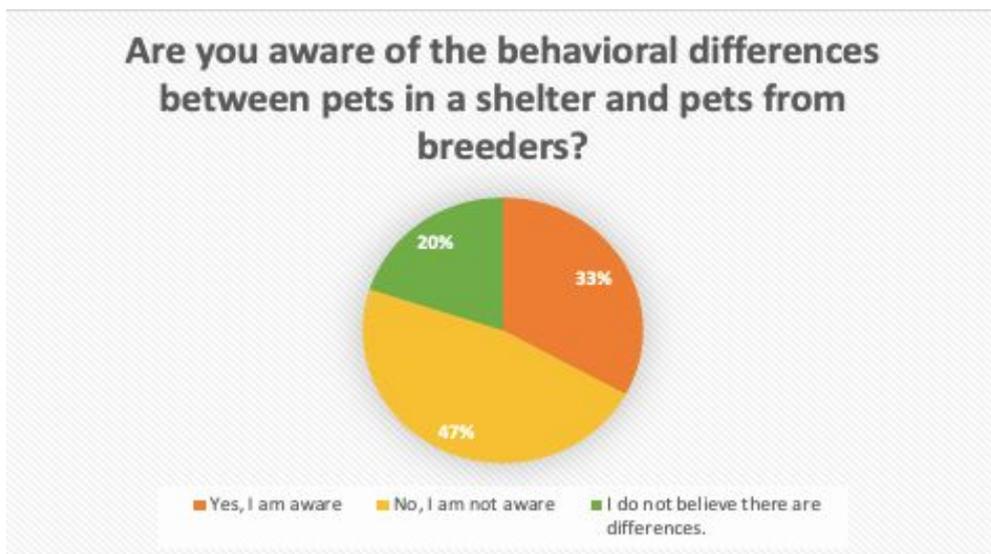
Executive Summary.....	3
Abstract.....	6
Background.....	6
Purpose.....	6
Literature Review.....	7
Research Questions.....	11
Methodology.....	11
Results and Analysis.....	12
Limitations.....	15
Managerial Implications.....	15
Conclusions and Future Studies.....	17
References.....	18
Appendix A: Survey Questions.....	20
Appendix B: Survey Results.....	26

### Executive Summary

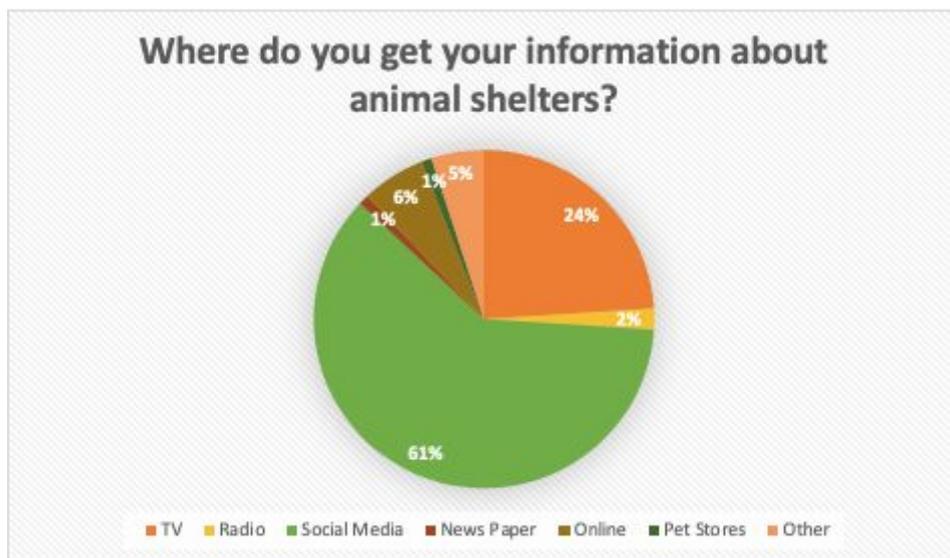
Operating as the main housing facility for stray animals in Hays County, the San Marcos Regional Animal Shelter is not only an adoption center for lost and owner surrendered animals, but also provides a multitude of different animal services. Some of these services include:

- Low-cost spay/neuter services
- Animal Control services
- Microchipping
- Volunteering/Fostering programs

The shelter, which mainly relies on support from its volunteering and animal fostering programs, is vital to the wellbeing of many pets and animals within San Marcos. O.U.R. PR firm conducted a survey of Texas State students to determine what their average level of awareness is in regards to the services that the shelter provides. Our survey also probed the respondent's understanding of the differences between for-profit pet breeders and animal shelters.



Our results showed that 47% of the students surveyed reported that they were unaware of the differences while 18% reported that they did not believe there were any differences between the two. These findings emphasized the need for an increase in understanding of the differences between the two types of pet providers. Within the ‘managerial implications’ section of this report, O.U.R. PR elaborates on a few tactics that could be employed to help increase this understanding amongst Texas State students. This will be accomplished by providing online brochures on social media to attract millennials and generation z, who are most likely to adopt. With 61% of respondents reporting that they received their news on social media platforms, this should be one the most impactful strategies for achieving our goals.



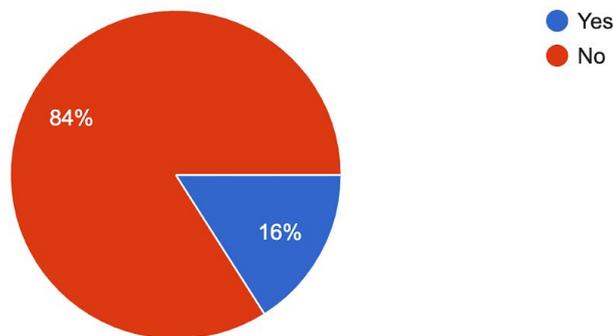
Amongst these respondents, the most popular platforms were as follows: 37% for Instagram, 28% for Twitter, 19% for Facebook and 12% for Snapchat. While other mediums like television, which polled at 24%, could also be utilized, but O.U.R. PR believes that social media campaigns will have the greatest influence on Texas State students.

The results of our survey also showcased a need for an increase in enrollment within the San Marcos Animal Shelter volunteering and fostering programs. Of all the students

surveyed, only 32% reported having experiences with a volunteering program at an animal shelter. The results were even slimmer for fostering programs with only 16% reporting a level of experience with these type of programs.

### Have you ever participated in a(n) animal foster program?

100 responses



With the majority of students alluding to their busy schedules as the primary reasoning for an inability to participate in such programs, the managerial implications portion of this report outlines the steps that shelters could potentially take to increase enrollment within these programs. One solution would require animal shelters to better communicate the responsibilities/requirements that are expected of foster parents and volunteers.

O.U.R. PR proposes that future studies implement targeted focus groups, informational seminars, pamphlets with facts, and participant observation to better understand the disparity between what people believe about animal shelter practices and breeder practices. It is clear that the majority of Texas State students lack a comprehensive understanding of the services that animal shelters provide, as well as the differences in operational standards from shelters and for-profit pet breeders.

### **Abstract**

This study examined Texas State students' knowledge on the difference between animal shelters and for-profit pet breeders through an online survey questionnaire. The responses revealed that the majority of people were not aware the different practices from for-profit breeders and animal shelters. There were students that understood why people wanted to get a designer breed from a for-profit breeder, but others that have adopted in the past knew the importance of adoption.

### **Background**

Numerous studies have been conducted on the problem of overcrowding in animal shelters and the detrimental health effects that puppies who a bred in puppy mills. Not to mention how for-profit pet breeders contribute to the former problem. O.U.R PR Firm believes that by finding out Texas State University students current knowledge of animal shelters, including no-kill, and then informing them of the facts about animal shelters and for-profit breeders, these students will hopefully be inclined to "adopt, don't shop" and inspire their friends and family to do the same. This study has examined research done across the United States at many facilities including other universities to animal shelters themselves, to put together information that will adequately test Texas State University students as well as inform them. The results and information gathered by this study will hopefully be used to better inform current and future students about the merits of pet adoption.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of our study seeks to increase the knowledge and awareness among Texas State students in regards to various animal shelter practices. We chose to focus on student's understanding of the differences between adopting from an animal shelter versus buying from a for-profit pet breeder, or a "puppy mill" (including pet stores that source from

these mills). In addition, we researched different methods and techniques that could be implemented by shelters in an attempt to increase their rates of adoption, as well as the predatory tactics used by for-profit breeders to sell their animals.

### **Literature Review**

In in past couple of years, numerous studies have been executed showing the disparity between the actual adoption rate of animals from animal shelters versus the number that are euthanized because of lack of adoption due in part to puppy mills among other factors. A annual study by The Humane Society (2019) called *The Horrible Hundred* give an indepth look on the conditions of puppy mills. In the study, they compare their results of the numbers of dogs in puppy mills and injuries to previous years. The conditions in which the animals are kept, some of the visible injuries, the primary sellers of puppy mills, the number of registered puppy mills in each state, are just some of the topics covered by this study. Information they have been able to find in previous years studies is included even if more of the same information was not able to be gathered in the current study. They also tell ways in which they have fought against puppy mills. All in all, *The Horrible Hundred* study is definitely a hard read; but eye opening.

The study by Burger (2013) expanded upon the problem of puppy mills, and shows how much this problem is rooted in money instead of being concerned about animal welfare (Burger, 2013). One of the biggest hurdles that must be overcome for the animal welfare movement to discourage purchasing from puppy mills, is the fact that the laws regulating animal breeding and cruelty are not standardized across states (Burger, 2013). The fact that the puppy mill industry brings in millions of dollars each year is horrifying considering that profitability is prioritized over the wellbeing of the animals. One way animal welfare activists have gone wrong is that they want to just shut down these puppy mills instead of encouraging

people to adopt instead. If people quit wanting to spend money at these mills then they would have to eventually shut down due to not being profitable. Furthermore, the sheer number of dogs that end up in shelters would decrease exponentially because puppy mills produce way more puppies than get sold.

It is estimated that millions of dogs end up in animal shelters each year (Mohan-Gibbons 2014). Only a small fraction of these dogs are adopted, while the rest of them end up getting euthanized. They say as many as 60% of the dogs in shelters are euthanized each year. Recent data from the American Pet Products Association (APPA) found that almost half of the US population owns a dog, even though only 20% of them adopted their animal from a shelter. According to Mohan-Gibbons (2014) studies done by Garrison, found that when he asked people who attained a dog in the past year where they considered getting their dog, 60% of them considered a shelter. However, only 39% of them said they actually attained their dog from a shelter. This leaves a huge gap for a potential market to increase visibility for adoption among dogs in shelters. This research was based on a novel adoption program to move shelter dogs into foster homes immediately, which was supposed to market the animals and find an adopter. The public learned about these available dogs through word of mouth and social media, which proved effective by getting dogs adopted in other areas than just the shelter. This method could increase adoption, benefit shelters and provide a new approach to the adoption market through their community (Mohan-Gibbons 2014).

Garrison and Weiss (2015) show that while approximately 3.9 million dogs enter animal shelters each year, and 31% are euthanized, and only 1.2 million are adopted (Garrison & Weiss, 2015). This problem is worsened by the fact that only 22% of dog owners say that they acquired their dog from an animal shelter, but the numbers go up to about half

when the survey participants were asked if they would want another dog (Garrison & Weiss, 2015). While this may seem like a big jump in numbers, only about half of those who already have owned a dog are responsible for the previous statistic. Clearly, the rate of dog adoption out of animal shelters is extremely low compared to the number of animals that are coming in. A solution found by some animal welfare organizations is to become a part of animal relocation programs (Garrison and, Weiss 2015). This allows these organizations to transport dogs that do not have a high demand in their area to areas that do want these dogs. While, this does help keep euthanization rates down; this solution is only a band-aid to the growing problem of people preferring to shop for their dogs instead of adopting.

A study conducted by Southland, Dowling-Guyer and McCobb (2018) surveyed 158 visitors to an urban area animal shelter over a two-month period. The results of their survey showed that 25% of visitors had adopted a pet, 20% claimed to be just visiting with no plans of adopting a pet and 11% had planned to adopt that day but ultimately chose not to. The study found that visitors who had adopted reported that the animals reaction was important in their decision to adopt, suggesting that animal shelters should look to provide more opportunities for visitors to interact with the animals to increase chances of adoption (Southland et al., 2018).

McGivern's (2017) study showed the economic benefits that Austin's 'No Kill' shelter has had and why they have had \$157 million economic impact. The conductors of the study share how the community has made an impact and the awareness that has come to this shelter. Furthermore, they share ways they are able to maintain the no kill status in the volunteer help, generous donations, the foster program, and they also provide free microchips and tags for Austin pets. All these small impacts have made a 90% or greater save rate since 2011.

Research done by Braverman (2016) showed that institutionalized killing related directly to profit. He was contemplating getting his daughter a dog and found some important information from a bioethicist, Jessica Pierce, who wrote the book “Run, Spot, Run” in 2016. The pet industry makes over 50.8 billion in the United States alone. Every 11 seconds a healthy dog or cat is euthanized in American shelters. The animals are viewed as cheap and disposable compared to the prices of everything else a shelter needs to stay afloat. The dogs are painted as happy in the shelters but that is a sad lie. The euthanasia rates in the United States are at a soaring high in comparison to other countries (Braverman, 2016).

According to a study done by Kenny (2010), as of 2010 over \$2.13 billion spent on live animal sales in the US market. Even with this amount, there are still approximately six to eight million animals entering shelters every year. Three to four million of those animals are euthanized. Millions of dogs in shelters are being euthanized every year while puppy mills are making millions of puppies every year. Local governments are trying to reduce the amount of attention on puppy mills through local ordinances by banning or limiting the sale of these animals. These ordinances will hopefully cut off puppy mills from selling their “products”, which will reduce the demand for puppy mills. By decreasing the supply, people will look for better ways to get a new pet such as shelters (Kenny, 2010).

A study conducted by Lepper, Kass and Hart (2010) looked to investigate the determinants of adoption of cats and dogs from a large municipal animal shelter. The study constructed models predicting the conditional probability of adoption using logistics regression and a final multiple logistic regression model from variables found to be important predictors of adoption. 4,813 cats and 3,301 dogs were studied, and the results showed that age, sex, coat color, and reason for relinquishment were the biggest determinants for

adoption. This information could be used to increase the adoption of frequently overlooked animals (Lepper et al., 2010).

Finally, the study done by Mcmillan, (2017) gathered info from 7 published studies and 1 anecdotal study. It demonstrated that dogs bought from commercial breeders have more physical, emotional, and mental problems rather than ones adopted from non-commercial breeders. The separation from their parents at an early age can cause some of these problems. The inadequate amount of social exposure also plays a role. In one of the studies it showed a higher percentage of pet store dogs demonstrated an aggressive attitude towards their new owner (11/20) compared to dogs in shelters (34/129). The dogs from pet shops also showed more social fears compared to dogs in the shelter. The study could show that it is better to adopt a dog from a shelter. It could potentially help the lives of many dogs in the future (Mcmillan).

### **Research Questions**

**RQ 1:** What is an average Texas State students level of knowledge on the differences between animal shelters and for-profit pet breeders?

**RQ 2:** Are Texas State students aware of the processes that can result in a kill shelters becoming a no kill shelters?

### **Methodology**

Our survey through Google Forms consisted of multiple choice questions, 5-point Likert scale and fill in the blank options. We ended up sending out our survey to fellow classmates, friends and group me for work and school. We got a total of 101 responses, in which we analyzed the answers and data we found. We chose to use Google Forms for our online survey because it's a more convenient way to attract participants, especially college students. People love to stay anonymous and have the ability to take a survey on their own

time at their leisure. Most people are more willing to participate when it's convenient and quick for them. It's the cheapest and fastest way to get results. We can also share our survey on any social media platform. This helps to get the most participants as possible, especially among college students since they are usually very active on social media.

We are targeting people that are 18-25 years old, but more specifically college students. This survey was the best option to try and reach busy college students. We will try to access them through our classmates at Texas State and sharing our survey on our social media pages. We hope that when they take this survey, it will bring more awareness to the benefits and reality of choosing adoption over shopping. We also hope as they take this survey they feel safe to express their opinions against adoption if they choose to do so. Students and young people love animals and tend to have a pet, so we want to inform them of reasons why they should consider adoption and the impact it will have on these animals lives.

Some disadvantages we could come across are college students attention spans are not very long. They like things to be short and fast. If the survey takes too long, they could lose interest quickly and not finish taking it. Another disadvantage is that if they don't understand a question, they won't be able to get clarification, which could lead to them not answering the question correctly or even not answering it at all.

### **Results and Analysis**

The majority of our responses (63%) were given from students that reported to be female (Table 16). With regards to classification, 35% of respondents were seniors, 25% juniors, 18% sophomores, 14% freshman and the rest reporting some type of graduate level of education (Table 17).

Of the students surveyed, there was almost a near split amongst students who said that they have and have not adopted an animal from a shelter in the past. Our study showed 55%

of respondents reported a previous adoption with 42% saying they had not (Table 5). The remaining respondents claimed to have acquired their pets either through a friend or finding a stray.

O.U.R PR also found that most students (47%) reported that they were unaware of the differences between animals adopted from a shelter and those that are purchased from breeders (Table 15). Not only this, but respondents did not fully understand the differences between kill and non-kill shelters. Ironically the majority of respondents that have been to a shelter visited the Austin no-kill animal shelter (Table 8). Of these respondents, 50% had a positive experience (Table 9). Most respondents reported that they got this information about animal shelters from social media (60%) and television (24%) (Table 1), who mainly use Instagram (37%) and Twitter (28%) the most. (Table 2)

Furthermore, 84% of the students surveyed reported to have never participated in a foster program that most shelters provide (Table 11). This question was further elaborated to ask students if they had done any type of volunteer work with an animal shelter with 68% reporting to have had no such experience (Table 12).

After an assessment of the results provided by our survey, it became apparent that Texas State students have a multitude of different reasonings that influence whether they want to get a pet from a shelter or a breeder. Some of the reasons provided ranged from “nobody wants a used dog” to “how pretty the dog is” or one opinion that states “if a dog ended up in a shelter it obviously deserved to be there”. It was also clear that there is a variance in student’s level of knowledge with regards to the services that an animal shelter provides. Because nearly 50% of our respondents had no idea of the reality behind animal shelter and breeder practices. (Table 15)

Even though half of the respondents had a positive experience, almost half don't know the difference between with adopting from a shelter versus a breeder. This is a major problem that they are gaining these animals without knowing the facts behind where they are obtaining their pet from. Students need to be more prepared and do their research before adopting any animal. It is a huge responsibility to take care of a pet. People need to be more knowledgeable and put a lot of thought into how much money goes into having an animal before adopting one, especially since we are college students and the fees to have an animal at a college apartment complex are high.

Another large problem we became aware of while going through our results were multiple instances of respondents not seeming to take the survey seriously, or not comprehending the seriousness of this situation. Thousands of dogs and cats are put down every day due to overcrowding of animal shelters that do not have the ability to be no-kill; and yet some respondents would rather pay for a dog from a breeder because of looks as aforementioned. Finding a way for Texas State University - San Marcos students to get to see the real life consequences of discarding animals, possibly by distributing pamphlets with facts on them, could promote a more serious understanding of this serious issue.

An increase in awareness of fostering and volunteering programs could not only help increase adoption rates but could also help to alleviate the day to day maintenance of local animal shelters. Also, it seems that Texas State University students do not have the desire to foster or maybe even the ability to (Table 12). This has caused the San Marcos animal shelter to not be able to become a no-kill shelter yet, considering fostering programs are a key component of no-kill shelters.

### **Limitations of the Research**

Our survey did have a few limitations. We shared the survey on social media and in different student group chats we were apart of. We were not able to do a focus group that would have gone more in depth with their responses. The nature of our topic could have used more personal stories. We also came across the issue of non Texas State students taking the survey. For future research, they should implement a screener question to eliminate this problem.

O.U.R. PR Firm used a non-random sample that was an online survey only. That let people respond anonymously, but we think that kept people from taking it seriously. One person put their sex as an “Apache Attack Helicopter.” (Table 16) Even with this answer, it can be assumed that the majority of the students were honest. Another issue arose when non Texas State students responded to the survey. While this could negatively affect our results, the number of responses from non Texas State students was such a small fraction that our results should still be considered an accurate representation. However, even with accurate responses the survey should not be considered a complete representation of the university because 35% of respondents were Seniors. (Table 17)

### **Managerial Implications**

Upon review of the data provided by our research, O.U.R. PR Firm believes that the implementation of the following procedures could improve a number of positive metrics associated with local animal shelters. The area where animal shelters stand to improve the most is with their fostering and volunteering programs. With 84% of respondents reporting no involvement with fostering (Table 11) and 68% for volunteering (Table 12) it’s clear that these metrics will need to be improved. O.U.R. PR believes that the best way to improve this category would be an increase in awareness of the responsibilities/requirements that are

expected of foster parents and volunteers. Many students reported that their schedules were their biggest objection with regards to the adoption process. If students had a better understanding of the time investment involved with fostering and volunteering they could be more likely to be involved with those programs.

In the fill in the blank portion of our survey, we noticed that many people were misinformed with information about animal shelters and breeders. One person stated that the reason they haven't adopted before was because they weren't old enough, which isn't accurate. Age requirements vary between shelters, but most require you to be at least 18 years old. We want to find a way to inform people of the accurate facts about how animal shelters are ran and how to adopt an animal and what is needed to adopt.

We believe this can be accomplished by providing online brochures on social media to attract millennials and generation z, who are the future for pet adoptions and saving animals who are on the brink of being euthanized. Brochures and handouts with animal shelter facts can also be passed out in the quad on campus where many students pass by multiple times a day. Furthermore, a general database for animal shelters within a certain radius of each other may be something to implement so that potential clients (animal adoptees) can preview the animals available before visiting a shelter, increasing the chances that they will be able to find the kind of dog they are looking for; keeping them from getting discouraged and buying from a breeder out of convenience.

Objective 1: To increase the percentage of Texas State University - San Marcos students knowledge of behavioral differences between pets adopted from shelters versus breeders from 33% to 50% by December 2019.

Objective 2: To increase the percentage of Texas State University - San Marcos students who participate in animal foster programs from 16% to 25% by December 2019.

Objective 3: To increase the percentage of Texas State University - San Marcos students who desire volunteer at animal shelters from 32% to 45% by December 2019.

### **Conclusion and Future Studies**

Based on our studies' research and survey findings, O.U.R. PR concludes that Texas State Students are woefully unaware of the reality behind animal shelter practices, and breeder practices. In the fill in the blank portion of our survey, we noticed that many people were misinformed with information about animal shelters and breeders. We want to find a way to inform people of the accurate facts about how animal shelters are ran and how to adopt an animal and what is needed to adopt.

O.U.R. PR proposes that future studies implement targeted focus groups, informational seminars, and participant observation to better understand the disparity between what people believe about animal shelter practices and breeder practices. Future studies could also try to reach a wider audience of students, to get more responses from people who take this issue seriously. One of the major difficulties with the study was receiving honest answers to survey questions, as we did get some responses that had nothing to do with the subject or were completely unusable because they were a joke. O.U.R. PR also proposes that future studies find a way to follow up with participants after they are informed of the reality of the situation to see if their stance changes.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Cover Page**

We are PR research students conducting a study about student's level of knowledge of various animal shelter practices and services, and how they differ from that of a for-profit breeder. You were selected as a participant in this study because you are a Texas State student. There will be no identifying information collected and all responses will be anonymous.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in this study you will complete a survey with a series of questions. These questions will ask you to tell us about your understanding of animal shelters and for-profit pet breeders.

Your time of participation should be approximately 5-10 minutes.

#### **Compensation:**

There will be no compensation for taking this survey.

#### **Contacts and Questions:**

The persons responsible for conducting this study are Kiana Harden, Jamie Wright, Alicea Hoffman, Dylan Blackmon and Parker Rhea.

**Survey design:**

On the following pages, you will see a series of statements that you will read and then circle a response that tells how you think or feel. Some questions may allow for additional information to be provided.

**Here is an example:**

- 1) Have you ever participated in a(n) animal foster program?
  - Yes
  - No

There are no right or wrong answers.

You will respond by circling the answer that best describes how you feel all or most of the time. Some of the questions may seem very similar, but they actually address different issues.

Please answer each question and circle only one answer.

When you are ready, please turn to the next page and begin.

### Survey Questions

1. Where do you get your information about shelters?
  - TV
  - Radio
  - Social Media
  - Newspaper
  - Other
  
2. Which social media platform do you use the most?
  - Twitter
  - Facebook
  - Snapchat
  - Instagram
  - Other (fill in)
  
3. Where do you believe the animals at pet stores come from? (Check all that apply)
  - Shelters/Rescues
  - Breeders
  - SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)
  - Puppy-mills
  - Other (fill in)
  
4. When was your last visit to an animal shelter or rescue?
  - 0 days-3 months
  - 3 months 1 day-6 months
  - 6 months 1 day-1 year
  - 1 year 1 day-2 years
  - 2+ years

- Never

5. Have you ever adopted or rescued an animal from a shelter or animal rescue?

- Yes
- No

If no, please share your reasonings as to why.

- Short answer text

6. Are you aware puppies and kittens are available in shelters?

- Yes, I am aware
- No, I was not aware
- I've heard it but didn't believe it

7. Are you aware designer/pure breeds are available in shelters?

- Yes, I am aware
- No, I was not aware
- I've heard it but didn't believe it

8. Have you ever adopted a pet from a breeder?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure
- Other (fill in)

9. Do you have experiences with any of these shelters? (check all that apply)

- Austin Animal Shelter (No-Kill)
- San Marcos Animal Shelter (Kill)
- San Antonio Humane Society (No-Kill)
- No
- Other (fill in)

If yes, what was that experience

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

10. Have you ever participate in a(n) animal foster program?

- Yes
- No

11. Have you ever volunteered/worked at an animal shelter or rescue?

- Yes
- No

12. How likely are you to adopt from a shelter or animal rescue in the future?

- Very Unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 Very Likely

13. If you are a pet owner, did you ever need to surrender your pet to a shelter?

- I am not a pet owner
- Yes, due to unforeseen circumstances
- I gave up a pet, but not to a shelter
- No
- Other (fill in)

14. In your opinion, why might someone adopt instead of shop?

- Short answer

15. Are you aware of the behavioral differences between pets in a shelter and pets from breeders?

- Yes, I am aware
- No, I was not aware
- I do not believe there are differences.

- Other (fill in)

If yes, then elaborate on your past experiences with dogs from a shelter vs a breeder?

- Short answer

16. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other (fill in)

17. What is your classification?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other (fill in)

Appendix B

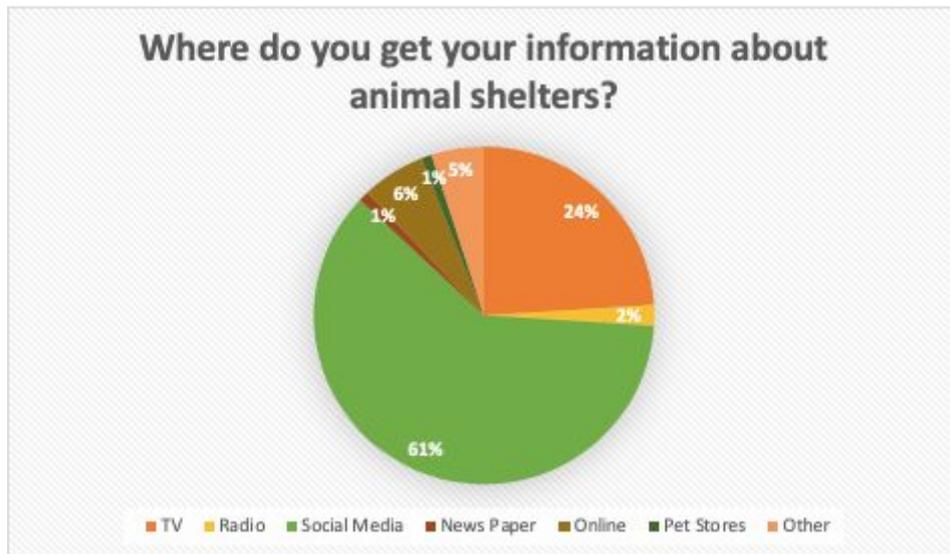


TABLE 1

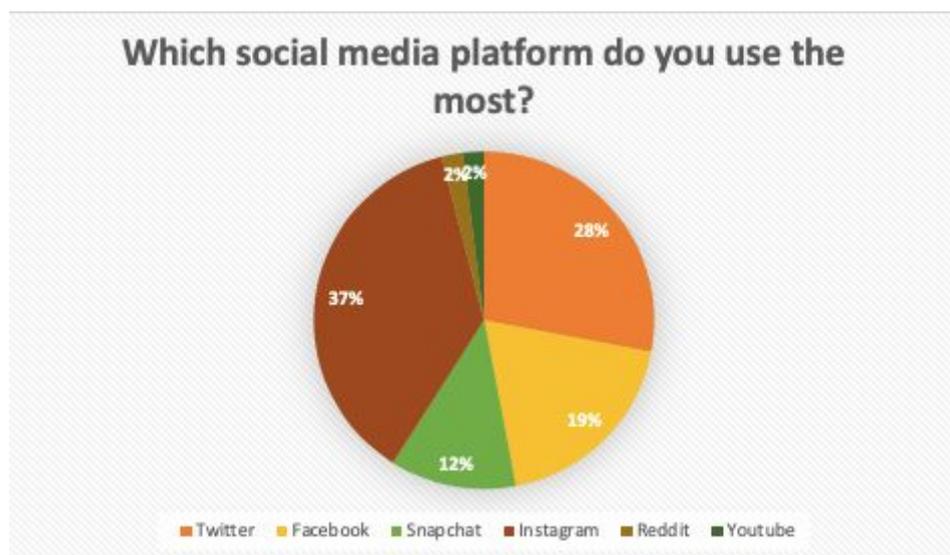


TABLE 2

Where do you believe the animals at pet stores come from? (Check all that apply)

100 responses

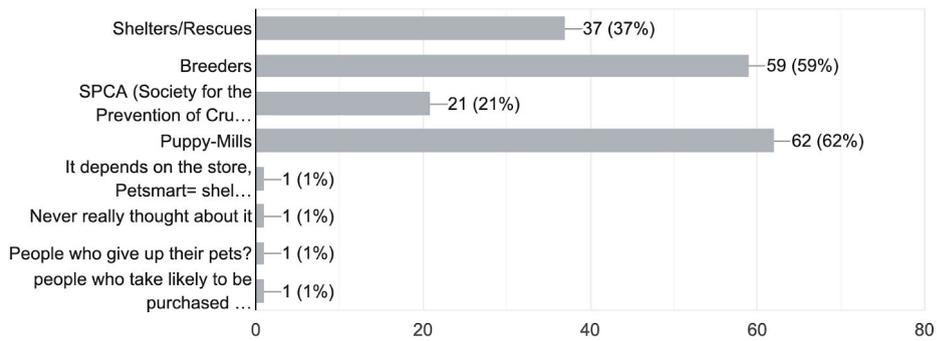


TABLE 3

When was your last visit to an animal shelter or rescue?

100 responses

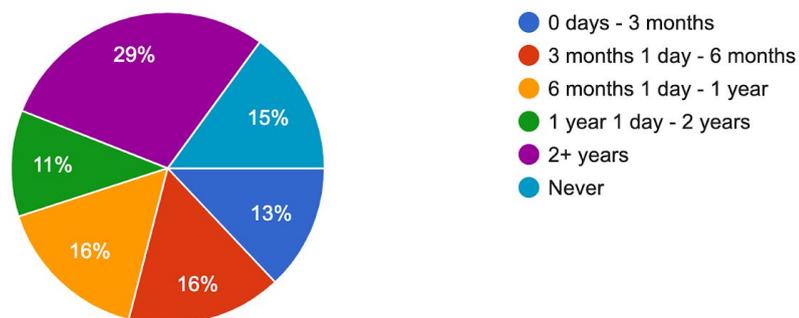


TABLE 4

### Have you ever adopted or rescued an animal from a shelter or animal rescue?

100 responses

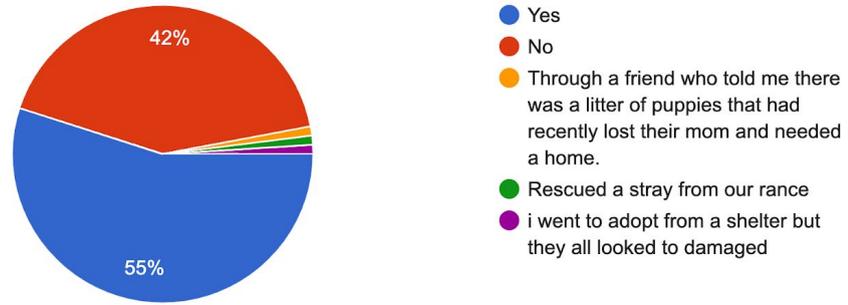


TABLE 5

### Are you aware puppies and kittens are available in shelters?

100 responses

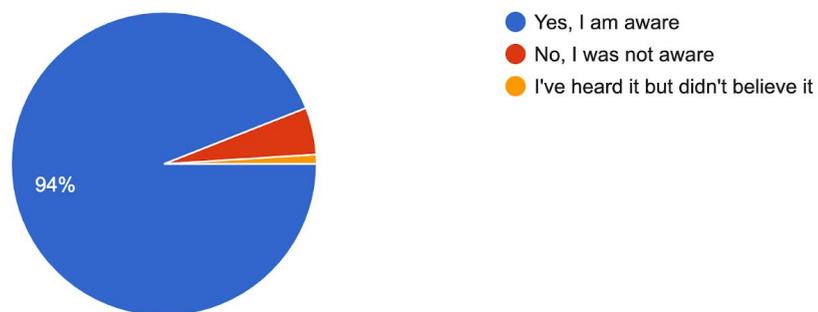


TABLE 6

### Are you aware designer/pure breeds are available in shelters?

100 responses

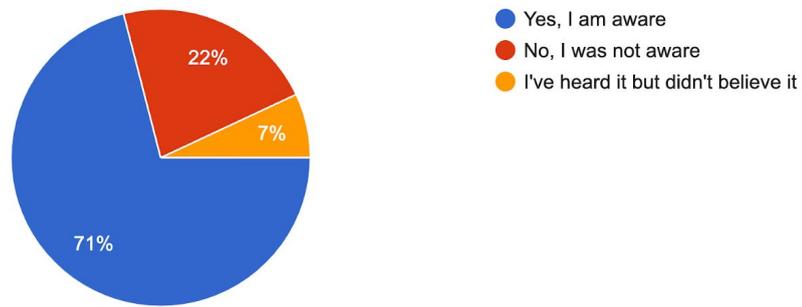


TABLE 7

### Have you ever adopted a pet from a breeder?

100 responses

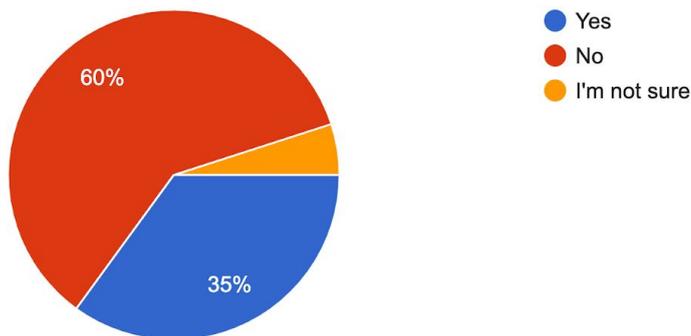
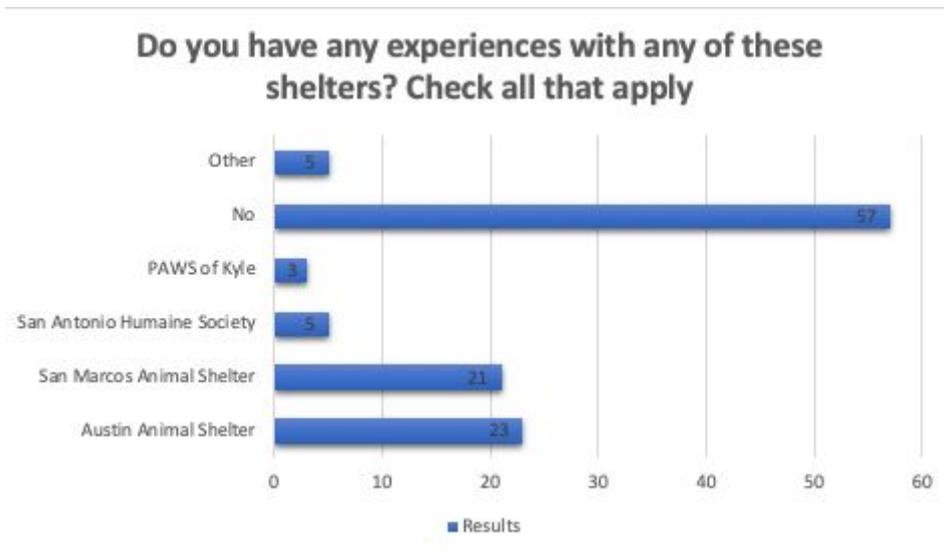
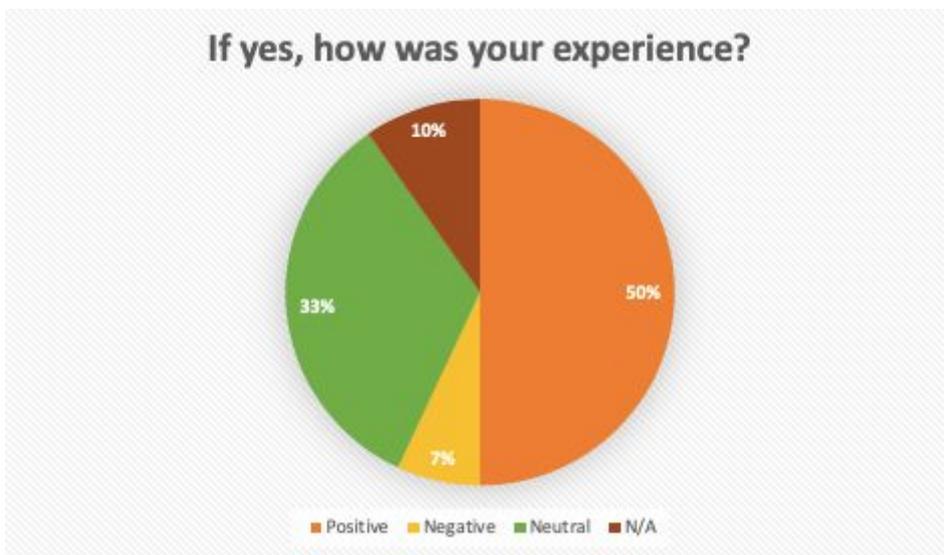


TABLE 8



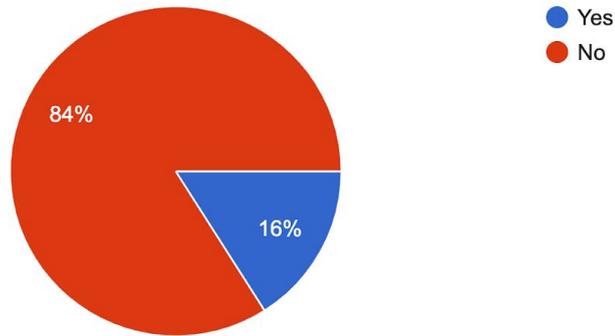
**TABLE 9**



**TABLE 10**

### Have you ever participated in a(n) animal foster program?

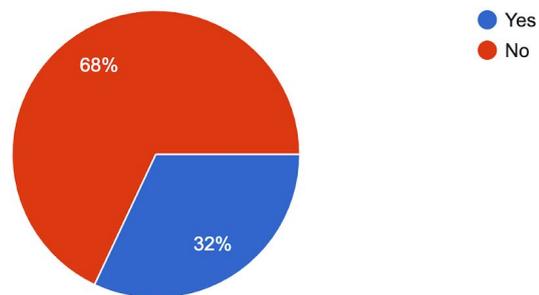
100 responses



**TABLE 11**

### Have you ever volunteered/worked at an animal shelter or rescue?

100 responses



**TABLE 12**

If you're to adopt in the future, how likely are you to adopt from a shelter or rescue?

100 responses

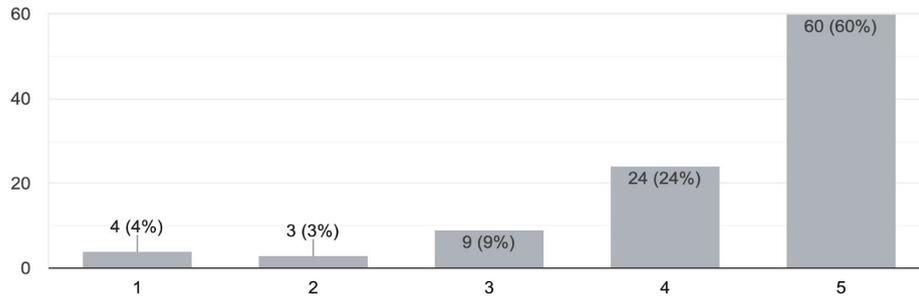


TABLE 13

If you are a pet-owner, have you ever needed to surrender your pet to a shelter?

100 responses

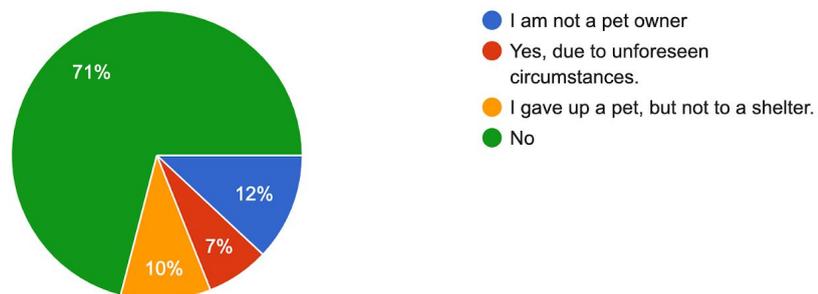
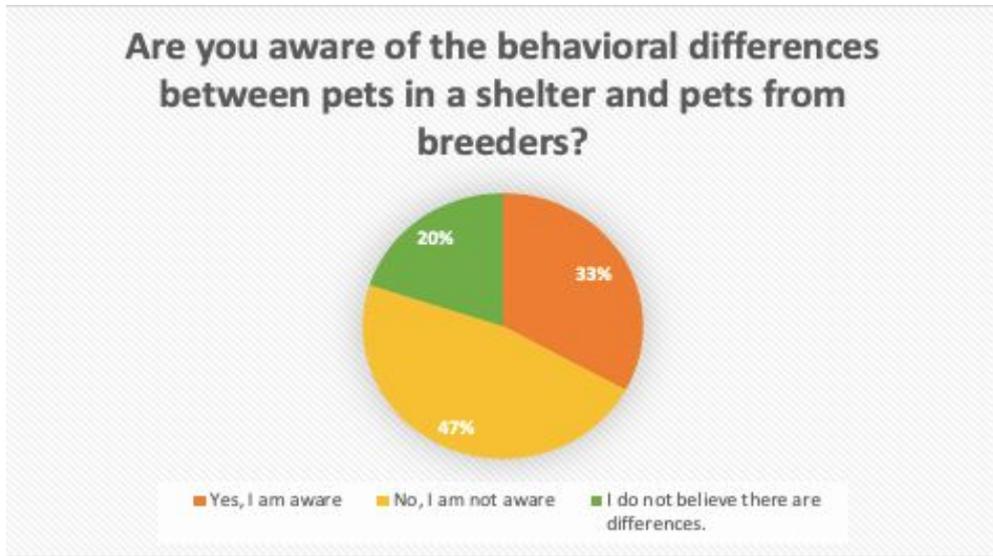


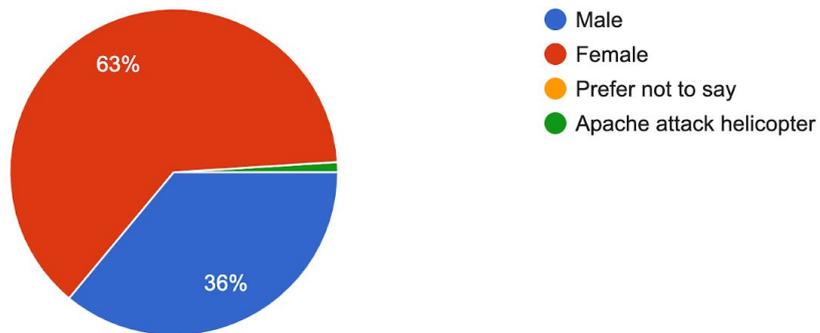
TABLE 14



**TABLE 15**

**What is your sex?**

100 responses



**TABLE 16**

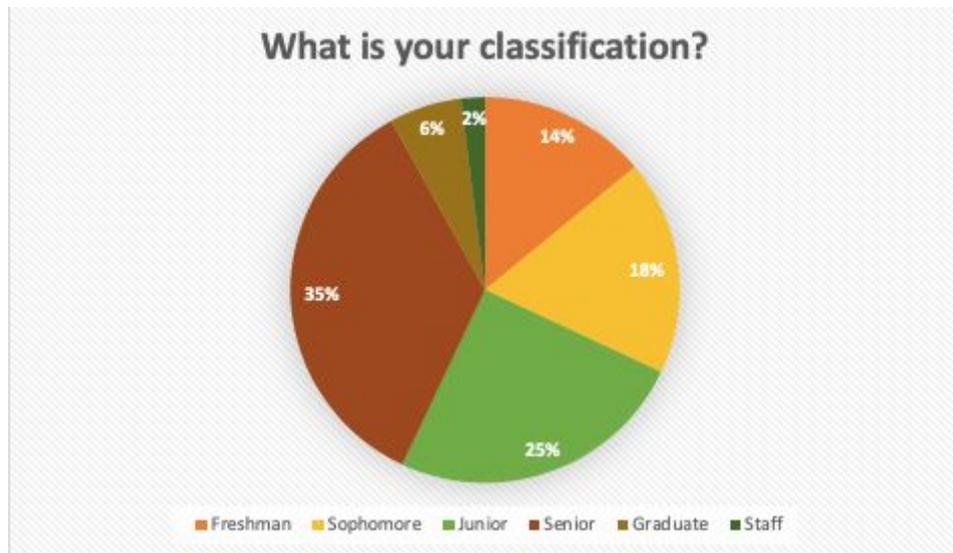


TABLE 17