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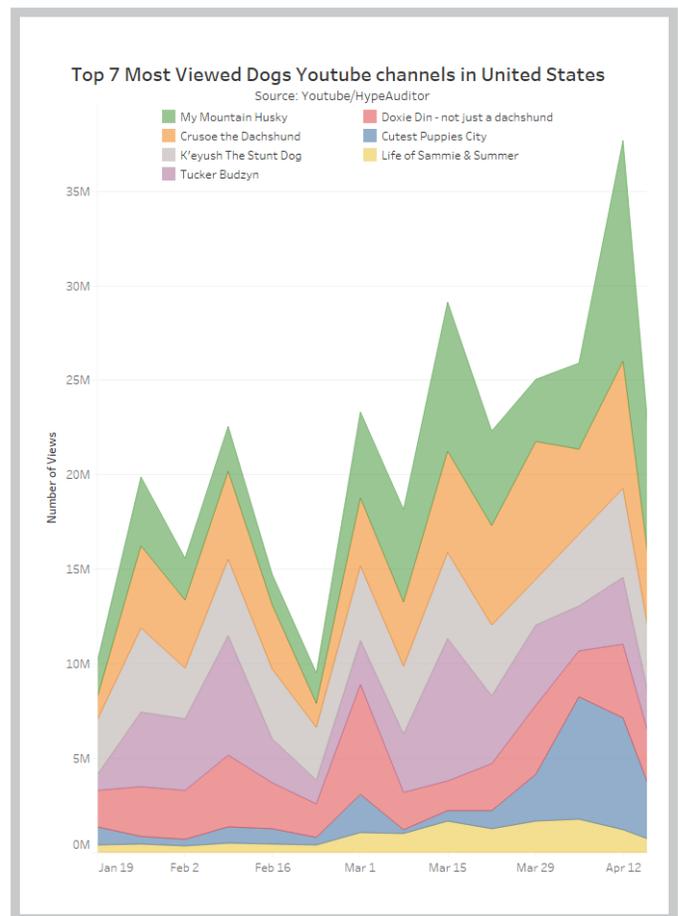
Who Brought the Dogs In?

An FTI internal investigation into dog adoptions since COVID-19

Several of our colleagues in FTI Consulting's Forensic & Litigation Consulting segment, from offices throughout the United States, have adopted pets since stay-at-home orders have been implemented. Also, we have seen articles about pet shelters emptying of animals as they were all adopted.¹ The apparent health benefits of having a pet have long been studied² and, given the current potential for increased anxiety and depression, an increase in pet ownership seems like one positive outcome of COVID-19. We decided to dig into the data a little further and analyze this trend.

Analysis and Findings

We initially noted that YouTube channels featuring dogs saw a general increase between January 1 and April 16, 2020. It appears people cannot get enough of cute puppies, even virtually.

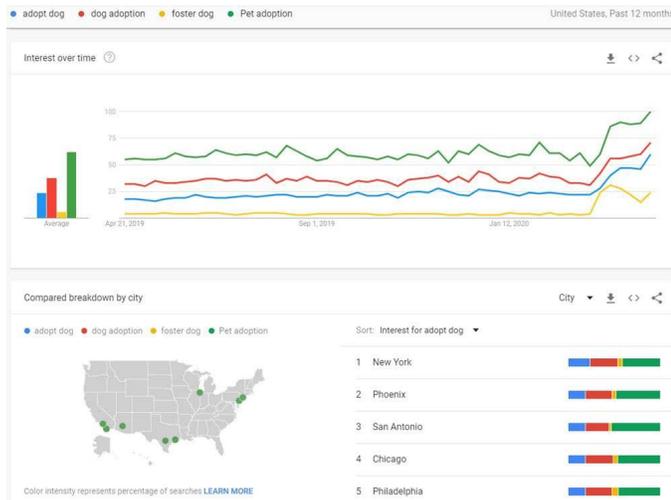


Source: Youtube/HypeAuditor

¹ <https://thehill.com/changing-america/sustainability/infrastructure/493091-every-dog-adopted-in-florida-shelter-for-the>
<https://thehill.com/homenews/news/489477-new-yorkers-have-nearly-emptied-shelters-for-dogs-and-cats-after-a-surge>
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-25/newest-shortage-in-new-york-the-city-is-running-out-of-dogs>

² <https://habri.org/research/mental-health/>
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lynette_Hart/publication/277078359_The_Role_of_Pets_in_Enhancing_Human_Well-Being/links/556170d908ae8c0cab31efc4/The-Role-of-Pets-in-Enhancing-Human-Well-Being.pdf

In addition, according to Google Trends, terms such as “adopt dog,” “dog adoption,” “foster dog,” and “pet adoption” saw a spike in searches on March 22-28, 2020, approximately week two of many state lockdowns. New York City appeared to have the highest number of searches for these terms, followed by Phoenix and San Antonio.



Source: <https://trends.google.com/trends>

Searching for pets to adopt does not necessarily mean more were adopted, however. We then obtained data from Petpoint, a subsidiary of Pethealth Inc. Petpoint provides data management software for shelters and rescue organizations and publishes information on the monthly demand for dogs and cats available for adoption. According to the Petpoint data, dog adoptions as a percent of new dogs to shelters were between 53-56 percent for the period of March 16 to April 12, 2019. This compares to dog adoptions as a percent of dog intakes between March 14 and April 3, 2020 – after lockdowns – which were between 73-84 percent. Cat adoptions had a similar uptick; from March 14 to April 3, 2020 between 71-88 percent of new cats to shelters were adopted, as compared to 41-48 percent during the same period last year.³

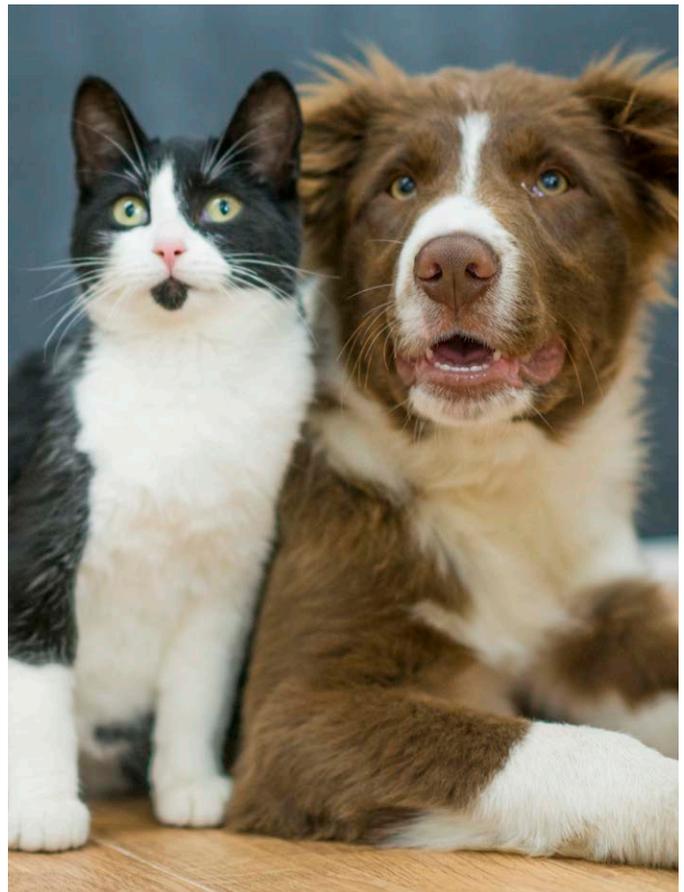
Similarly, in New York City, foster care trends skyrocketed in March 2020 when compared to March 2019. Foster Dogs, a New York City-based non-profit, received 3,045 applications to foster in March 2020, compared to about 140 applications during the same month last year, a 20-fold increase, and 50 percent of the foster caretakers were first-time adoptees.⁴

Is There a Downside?

New York City residents can report a multitude of complaints, including those related to barking dogs using the City’s 311 service. We were curious to see whether the apparent increase in fostering and pet adoptions has resulted in spikes in dog-related issues. With respect to noise, an increase in dog fosters and adoptions presumably means more dogs in New York City homes and apartments, which could lead to a spike in complaints about the neighbor’s [new] noisy dog.

We studied the data, looking at complaints since New York City started social distancing measures – on March 12 mass gatherings were restricted; on March 16 an initial list of business were required to be closed; March 18 brought on the closure of educational institutions, and March 22 saw the stay-at-home order implemented.

As illustrated by the following graph that compares the same year-over-year weeks between 2019 and 2020, the



³ https://www.petpoint.com/Industry_Data

⁴ <https://www.fosterdogsnyc.com/blog/2020/4/covid-19-roster-placements>

dog noise complaints were relatively the same during the first week of and then started trending downward as compared to the same weeks in 2019. We observe that despite the increase in dog fosters and adoptions, the noise complaints are significantly down. Perhaps this means that not only the owners are reaping the health benefits of a pet but the pets themselves are happier and not as noisy while their owners are off at work. Alternatively, it is possible that the owners are just home to tell their pups to “shush” before they bother the neighbors.

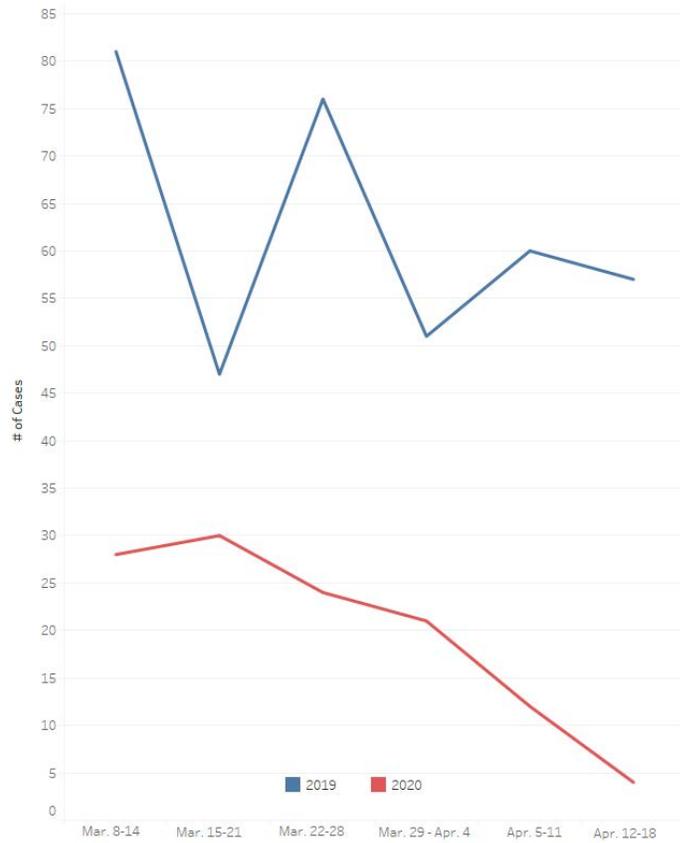
that the number of reports is relatively small – less than 30 in each weekly period; not a statistically significant sample size from which to draw conclusions.

One additional piece of data within the annals of the NYC 311 data is dog waste. We were surprised to see that these unpleasant complaints were also markedly down as compared to the same weeks in 2019. It appears all of these new dog owners are doing a good job of poop-scooping.

NYC Barking Dog 311 Complaints Source: NYC Open Data



NYC Dog Waste 311 Complaints Source: NYC Open Data



Source: NYC Open Data

Source: NYC Open Data

New York City residents can also report instances of off-leash dogs to 311 and we took a similar dive into this data to determine if these new dog owners were responsibly leashing their dogs or if they were letting them run wild. Based on the 311 data, it appears that off-leash dog complaints spiked in the weeks of March 29 and April 5 when compared to the previous weeks and the same data from the prior year. This period was just after the stay-at-home order was mandated. However, we note



Conclusion

There is currently an onslaught of negative news and it is easy to get mired in the spiral of depressing articles. However, it seems that dog adoptions, in the wake of COVID-19, is one positive story that we can feel good about. As such, we would like to welcome to our newest furry FTI colleagues, Fred, Griff and Elbie, shown here.



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