

CAPSTONE

Section Two

The Research

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APPENDIX ONE

Innovation Situation Summary

For many dog owners, the difficult decision to re-home or surrender their dog is not driven by regret or lack of desire for ownership but rather by various reasons that make it necessary to give them up. Unfortunately, in 2023, financial reasons have become the leading cause of dog surrenders, impacting both the pre-adoption process and post-adoption experience.

The abundance of online information has left many prospective dog owners overwhelmed and ill-prepared for the financial responsibilities of owning a dog, particularly the difference in breeds. As a result, adoptions are occurring with little research, leaving many owners unprepared for the necessary expenses of proper dog care. From pet supplies and grooming to veterinary bills, many owners struggle to provide their dogs the care they require.

Many owners are unaware of the resources available to assist them with the financial burden of caring for their dogs, leading to an increase in surrenders or re-homing. Some cases even involve state intervention due to inadequate care, forcing owners to surrender their dogs.

One of the most pressing issues arising from the lack of financial resources and awareness is the failure to spay or neuter dogs. Unfortunately, this oversight leads to the birth of over 70,000 dogs in America per day, many of which are unwanted litters.

This overpopulation of dogs, coupled with the increase in owners being forced to re-home or surrender their pets due to financial constraints, has created a severe overcrowding problem in animal shelters. With shelters becoming overfilled, they are often forced to turn dogs away or even resort to euthanizing healthy animals.

As a lifelong dog owner, I found a deep connection with this topic as it involves dogs and their well-being. With this ongoing and growing problem of dog overpopulation, re-homing and surrendering, and shelter overcrowding, I have decided to center my Capstone project on finding a solution to this critical issue. Through my Capstone project, I hope to make a meaningful contribution to the effort to address this critical issue and improve the lives of dogs and their owners alike.

APPENDIX TWO

Sense intent

The Sense Intent is the pivotal first step in initiating the innovation process. It entails an examination of the current landscape, including the changes in business, technology, society, and other factors. Understanding the environment enables us to identify any shifts impacting our topic. This forms the foundation for recognizing the underlying problem and, subsequently, devising an effective solution that factors in the ever-changing trends.

The pandemic was a pivotal time for many aspects of the world, including the way people sought comfort during difficult times. I, like many others, got my first dog during peak Covid time. In fact, about 23 million people across the US added a dog to their house, which is about one in five households (ASPCA, 2022). In a time when people could not see friends and family and had countless hours at home available, getting a dog became a saving grace for mental health for many people during a very difficult time. Along with the pandemic, America underwent many other extreme incidents. Through social issues, political unrest between parties, and an uncertain economic climate, many found sanctuary with their dogs as an escape from the outside environment. For me, my dog became the only thing stable in such an unstable world.

However, as I returned to school in person, I encountered various issues with my dog, including severe separation anxiety, as he was used to being around me 24/7. Seeking help from a behavioralist was an expensive option. Instead, I turned to TikTok, where I found advice in dog training and behavioral videos. I found comfort in the comments that many other owners faced similar difficulties. As many other dog owners were seeking information from TikTok, I also found that users were using TikTok as a form of entertainment, something I then shifted into. In 2022, users spent an average of 95 minutes a day scrolling (Wallaroo, 2022), prompting advertisers to shift their focus to digital platforms, with 57.1% of all advertising spending allocated to digital in 2023 (Forbes, 2023).

Further, influencers, especially on TikTok, became the new way for brands to communicate with their audience. As I watched many dog accounts, I received many ads related to dog products while also seeing dog accounts with a large following advertising products. It takes Gen Z about 1-3 seconds to decide if they like a video before scrolling (Insider, 2022), so marketing strategies had to drastically readjust from advertising previously used.

Beyond product and service advertising, it became apparent that Gen Z and Millennials expected companies to stand with a social movement. They expected companies to be loud with their messaging and no longer wanted companies to be silent about critical social causes (Nielson, 2022).

Drawing from my understanding of the current state of the environment, the shift in advertising and how we communicate with younger generations, as well as my personal experience with getting a dog, I continued to the rest of the modes for my Capstone project with this in mind.

APPENDIX THREE

Know Context

The Know Context enters the understanding of surrounding conditions, facilitating the development of comprehensive context. The Know Context mode examines the past to understand the present in order to get a clear understanding of the context and how innovation will take play in the future.

The prospect of getting a dog is an exciting experience. Some individuals impulsively walk into shelters and leave with a dog, while others invest months researching before deciding to adopt a dog, either through a breeder or a shelter. For me, I spent most of my quarantine researching different breeders online in order to find the perfect fit. Although spontaneous adoptions can lead to feeling overwhelmed quickly as the responsibility of taking care of the dog begins to set in, I experienced the same despite my extensive research. An overload of research online can make it hard to decipher which information is valuable, and no matter how long a person researches, it is still hard to grasp the full responsibilities. From the cost of necessities and vet bills to emergency visits and overall dog care, owning a dog can be a challenging experience. Maintaining dog ownership becomes increasingly difficult without the expectation of financial responsibility, especially in life-or-death situations or in preparation for economic instability. For this reason, many owners re-home/surrender their dogs as they are no longer fit to care for them.

While animal shelters have been around for 150 years (Time, 2021), dog adoption continues to grow year after year. In the wake of the pandemic, over 12 million people in the US have added pets to their households (Time, 2021). However, with more adoption comes more dogs, leading to a dramatic increase in overpopulation. The leading cause of this is negligence in getting dogs spayed or neutered. As someone who grew up owning dogs, I did not think twice about fixing my puppy, but many neglect to do so. The rising overpopulation of dogs has overwhelmed shelters, forcing them to turn away animals frequently. Tragically, many dogs never get adopted, and some states and shelters resort to euthanasia.

Despite my personal experience, I needed to get a better grasp on the most significant issues America is facing when it comes to dog ownership. My big questions before beginning my secondary research were:

- What causes people to re-home/surrender their dogs?
- Despite re-homing/surrendering, what reasons are shelters overcrowded?

My findings were as followed:

- The top reasons owners regret getting a dog leading them to rehome/return to shelter are:
 - Financial
 - Behavioral issues
 - Unwanted Litters
 - Health issues and vet bills
 - Lack of experience
 - Housing

Financial:

Over the past decade, the financial burden of owning a dog has increased, with dog owners now spending an average of \$1,480 annually, which is \$1,020 more than in 2013 (Bureau Labor of Statistics, 2022). Unfortunately, financial strain is the primary reason that people surrender their dogs, as they struggle to cope with the cost of basic needs and unexpected expenses of their dogs (Washington Post, 2022). Shockingly, the number of surrendered pets has risen to nearly 1 in 4, up from 1 in 10 prior to COVID, when the economy was more stable (Washington Post, 2022). The Human Society of the United States stated, "When the economy is struggling, families are struggling. That shows up in surrenders". Many families are now forced to choose between feeding their families or their pets. Moreover, the recent inflation has caused an increase of 8.3% in pet product prices, and over 75% of dog owners state that inflation is making dog ownership too expensive, according to a survey conducted by LendingTree, a leading online financial service marketplace.

Behavioral Issues:

Behavioral issues are a significant problem for shelter dogs, often making them more susceptible to being surrendered again. Unfortunately, many of these issues can be traced back to the shelter environment. Additionally, many dogs come from abusive homes where they may have developed aggressive tendencies, which owners may not discover until after adoption (ASPCA, 2022). While there are many forms of aggression, such as fear, possessiveness, and territorial behavior, it is when a dog's aggression is directed toward other pets or children that it becomes a major concern for owners and often leads to rehoming or surrender. In some cases, rehoming may become impossible without the help of a professional behaviorist, which can be costly.

Unwanted Litters:

As mentioned, inflation has increased many pet expenses; one of the significant ones is vet bills for spaying/neutering. Because of this, many owners are often deterred from fixing their dogs strictly because of their available finances. Although many non-profit organizations offer free or low-cost fixing, many owners are unaware of the available resource or still fail to fix their dogs (PETA, 2021). A fertile dog can produce up to two litters per year with an average of 2-12 puppies per litter (AKC, 2021). Because of this, an estimated 70,000 puppies are born per day (World Animal Association, 2020). If owners, not including certified breeders, neutered and spayed their dogs, the overpopulation can be reduced by 100% (World Animal Association, 2022). The World Animal Association states, "When a pet owner fails to spay or neuter their pets, they end up having accidental litter that is either too expensive to maintain or unwanted. Resultantly, the litter ends up abandoned or at a shelter."

Health Issues and Vet Bills:

Because of the expenses of vet bills, only 68% of dog owners go to the vet for a routine physical, with only 58% going because of vaccines. According to the AKC, 56% of pet parents cannot afford an emergency visit in 2022. While numerous resources are available for pet owners in financial need, including pet insurance, low-cost clinics, and local assistance programs, many remain unaware of these options (Canine Journal, 2022).

Housing:

In October 2022, 5.2 million households were behind on rent (National Equality Atlas, 2022), putting 7.4 million pets on the verge of homelessness (American Pets Alive, 2022). Due to the current housing crisis fueled by a poor economy, numerous dog owners have had to downsize their houses or relocate to apartments. Many landlords' pet policy restricts certain breeds or bans dogs altogether. Additionally, the downsized houses can lack a yard or a large enough play area for larger dogs (MSPCA, 2022). As a result, many homeless dogs will be forced into shelters.

Primary Research:

After completing my secondary research, I utilized Qualtrics to conduct a survey. The survey aimed to better understand the participant's demographics, behaviors, and dog ownership knowledge. To reach a diverse pool of respondents, I shared the survey on my Instagram and various Facebook groups dedicated to dog owners. Because of this social approach, I received 77 completed surveys.

Questions I asked that yielded to insightful information were:

- Have you ever had to rehome a dog?
 - If yes, why?
- To what extent do you agree with the following statements
 - Cleaning up after my dog(s) is a pain
 - It is hard to find someone to watch my dog(s) when I am at work or traveling
 - Having my dog(s) is too expensive
 - My dog(s) never stop barking
 - My dog(s) have ruined my social life
 - My dog(s) is aggressive towards others
 - Do you regret getting your dog?

From the results I acquired the following analysis:

Rehoming:

Overall, the primary reason for participants to re-home their dogs was financial strain. Although they initially believed they could afford a dog, unforeseen medical bills, the rising cost of pet supplies, and inflation within the economy for necessary supplies for them and their families made it difficult to keep their dogs. While some participants returned their dogs to the shelter, others found friends or family to re-home them. One participant even found a local re-homing Facebook group where she was able to find a new owner for her dog. It is worth noting that most participants adopted from the shelter. However, one participant who adopted from a breeder stated that she returned the dog to the breeder, who then found the dog a new home. According to the participant, this is common practice for breeders and is usually stated in their contracts.

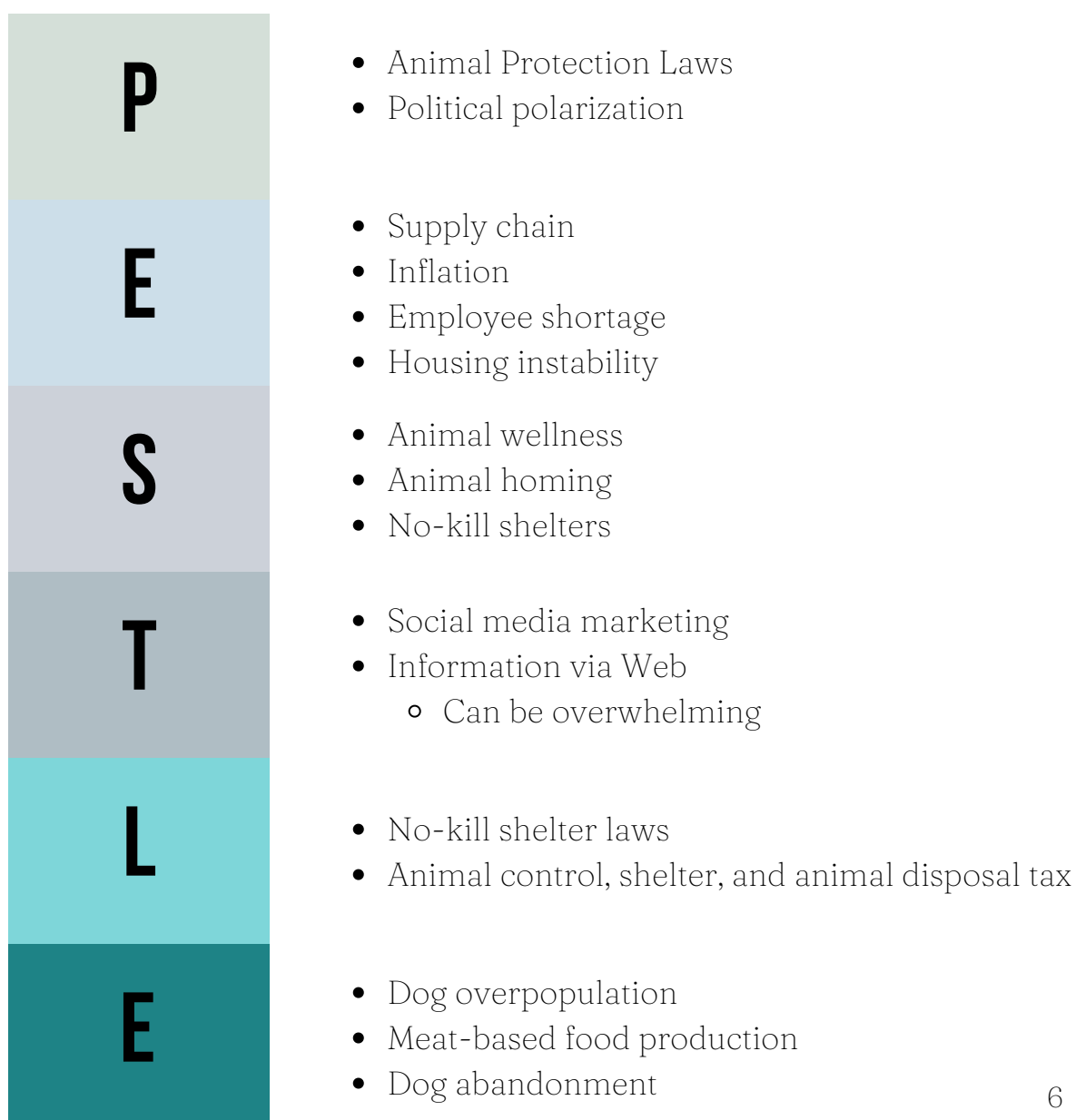
Behavioral Statements:

The survey results revealed that most participants strongly disagreed with the statement “my dog(s) have ruined my social life,” with 51 participants expressing this sentiment. Similarly, a large portion of respondents (44) strongly disagreed with the statement, “my dog(s) is aggressive towards others.” Conversely, very few participants strongly agreed with any of the statements, with the highest (10 participants) indicating that “it is hard to find someone to watch my dog(s) during the day or while I travel.”

Responses were more evenly distributed for the remaining statements between “somewhat disagree” and “somewhat agree.” Notably, the statement with the highest number of “somewhat disagree” responses were “cleaning up after my dog is a pain,” with 19 participants expressing this view. The statement with the highest number of “somewhat agree” responses was “having my dog(s) is too expensive,” with 24 participants expressing this view.

Do you regret getting your dog?

Among the fifteen questions, the most striking results came from the question regarding regret in dog ownership. An overwhelming 94.03% of respondents expressed that they “definitely do not” regret their decisions, while a small percentage of 2.99% said “probably not,” and another 2.99% said “sometimes.” Notably, none of the 77 respondents said “probably yes” or “definitely yes” to regret getting a dog.



APPENDIX FOUR

Know People

Know People enables a profound understanding of individuals by delving into their thoughts, emotions, and needs. This understanding is critical for adopting an empathetic design approach, where solutions are created that effectively connect innovations to people. By using this approach, new categories of products and services can unlock, creating transformative results.

Utilizing the same survey described previously in Mode Three, the following questions were provided to the 77 participants in order to get a better understanding of the dog owner stakeholder:

- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What is your highest level of education?
- What is your household income?

Dog Owner:

The study population included an age range of 18 to 65+, with the youngest segment (18-24) making up the majority at 44% and 25-34 year-olds accounting for 25.33% of the participants. Among the respondents, the majority identified as female (82.67%), 12% identified as male, and 4% as non-binary/third gender. As for education, the most frequently reported highest level of education was a bachelor's degree (65.33%), followed by a master's degree (21.33%). Notably, none of the participants held a Ph.D. or higher degree.

The yearly household income of participants spanned a wide range, from less than \$25,000 to more than \$200,000, with three respondents declining to disclose their income. It is worth highlighting that the reported household income will vary per participant depending on how many people reside in their household, including spouses. The most common reported income brackets were \$51,000-\$100,000, constituting of 32% of responses, and \$101,000-200,000, representing 29.33% of responses.

Shelter Observations:

Method: After conducting secondary research on animal shelters in Denver, I discovered that the Dumb Friends League was the closest to my location. I decided to go to the shelter to understand better the operations of an animal shelter, including employee interaction, customer interaction, and the environment for the animals. During my visit, I noted all my observations and then filled out P.O.E.M.S. (pictured on page).

Observations:

The Dumb Friends League is impeccably organized for an animal shelter. Housing both cats and dogs, the shelter is spacious, with various play areas and appropriately sized kennels. The play areas allow potential adopters to play with dogs to observe the dogs' interactions. What sets this shelter apart from other shelters I have been to in the past is the uncluttered, clean environment with exceptional care from employees and volunteers.

P

- Potential adopters
- Animal caretakers
- Janitors
- Front desk clerk
- Volunteers

O

- Kennels
- Food + water
- Toys
- Dogs + cats

E

- Kennels
- Outdoor play area
 - Grass
- Sidewalk around shelter
 - Walks
- Adoption room

M

- Brief description of each dog on each kennel
 - Do they like kids?
 - Do they get along with other animals?
 - etc.

S

- Cleaning
- Walking
- Playing
- Cuddling
- Adopting
- Volunteering

After finishing my primary research, I began my secondary research to further identify peoples' behaviors, way of thinking, behaviors, and needs. From there, I was able to identify my primary and secondary stakeholders.

Shelters:

- Approximately 3.1 million dogs enter U.S. animal shelters each year
- It costs taxpayers approximately 2 billion dollars each year to round up, house, kill, and dispose of homeless animals
- Only 10% of dogs born will find a permanent home

Animal Protection:

- All 50 states have their own Animal Protection laws. Each state determines what constitutes cruelty and the punishments. These laws apply to owners, shelters, vet clinics, and other pet businesses
- In my state, Colorado, it is illegal to “mistreat, neglect, or abandon domestic and companion animals”. The Colorado government defines this as the following:
 - Lack of food or clean water
 - Extremely thin/emaciated animals
 - Untreated wounds or other medical conditions (e.g., limping, lameness)
 - Significant matted fur or fur infested with mites, fleas, or ticks
 - Lack of sanitary or safe living conditions, overcrowding or lack of sufficient space for animals, failure to quarantine sick animals
 - Lack of adequate protection from severe weather (extreme heat or cold) for species that require it

Pet Insurance:

- The average cost of pet insurance is \$30-\$50 per month, per pet
- Only 1% to 2% of dog owners have pet insurance
- 1 in 3 pets will need emergency vet treatment within a given year
 - An emergency vet treatment can average anywhere between \$800 to \$1500
- Pet insurance functions more like property insurance rather than health insurance
- Pet insurance in North America is forecasted to exceed a revenue of 3.8 billion dollars by 2027

STAKEHOLDER

WHY

First-time Potential Dog Adopters

Primary Stakeholder

The potential first-time adopter is researching, talking to peers, and seeking information through social media before deciding to adopt a dog. They are overwhelmed with the amount of information they receive and seek an easier way to decide.

Dog Owners

Primary Stakeholder

Dog owners want to ensure they give the best quality lives to their dogs without the dogs interfering or negatively impacting their own lives.

Animal Shelters

Primary Stakeholder

Animal Shelters want owners to be prepared for the life of having a dog and the responsibilities that come with it. They want to minimize return/rehoming rates in order to not have an overflow of dogs, potentially leading to euthanasia.

Pet Insurance

Pet Insurance companies ensure that dog owners are prepared for emergencies and ensure dogs get the proper medical care they need, both by law and ethically. Not only does it benefit owners from hefty vet bills, but it also benefits the company's profit.

APPENDIX FIVE

Frame Insights

Frame Insights is a pivotal stage where knowledge gained is transformed into an understanding. The Frame Insights mode involves transitioning from researching and collecting data to analyzing it to uncover insights that inform the innovation process. These insights serve as a guiding principle for developing innovative solutions that effectively address challenges.

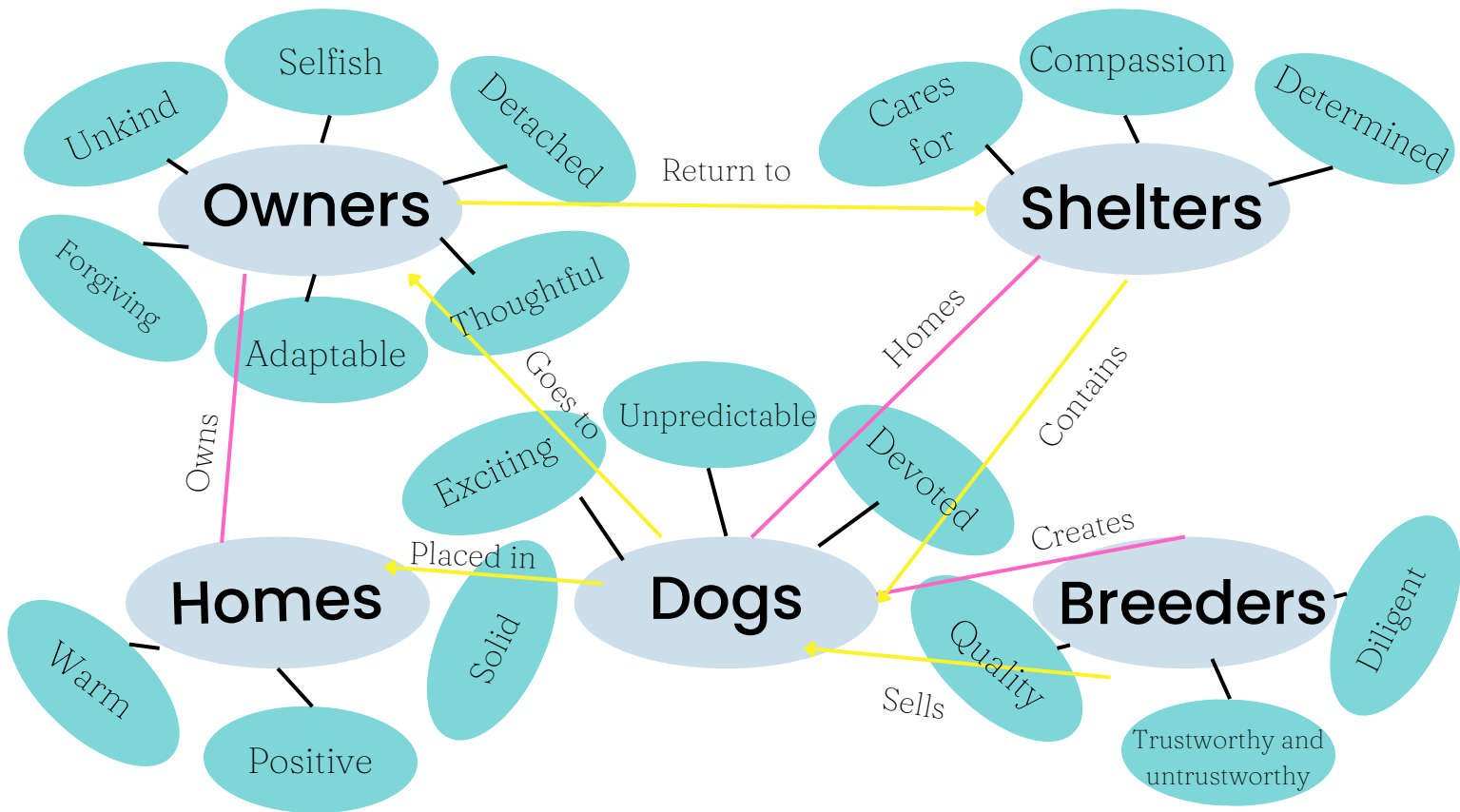
At the beginning of my research, I was determined to unravel the underlying reason behind the stat that “54% of dog owners regret getting a dog”. However, delving deeper into my research, I realized that this statistic was just a small fragment of a much larger issue: the overwhelming overpopulation of dogs and overcrowding of shelters.

The outcome of my research led to several key insights, achieved through a comprehensive analysis of homework, secondary, and primary research.

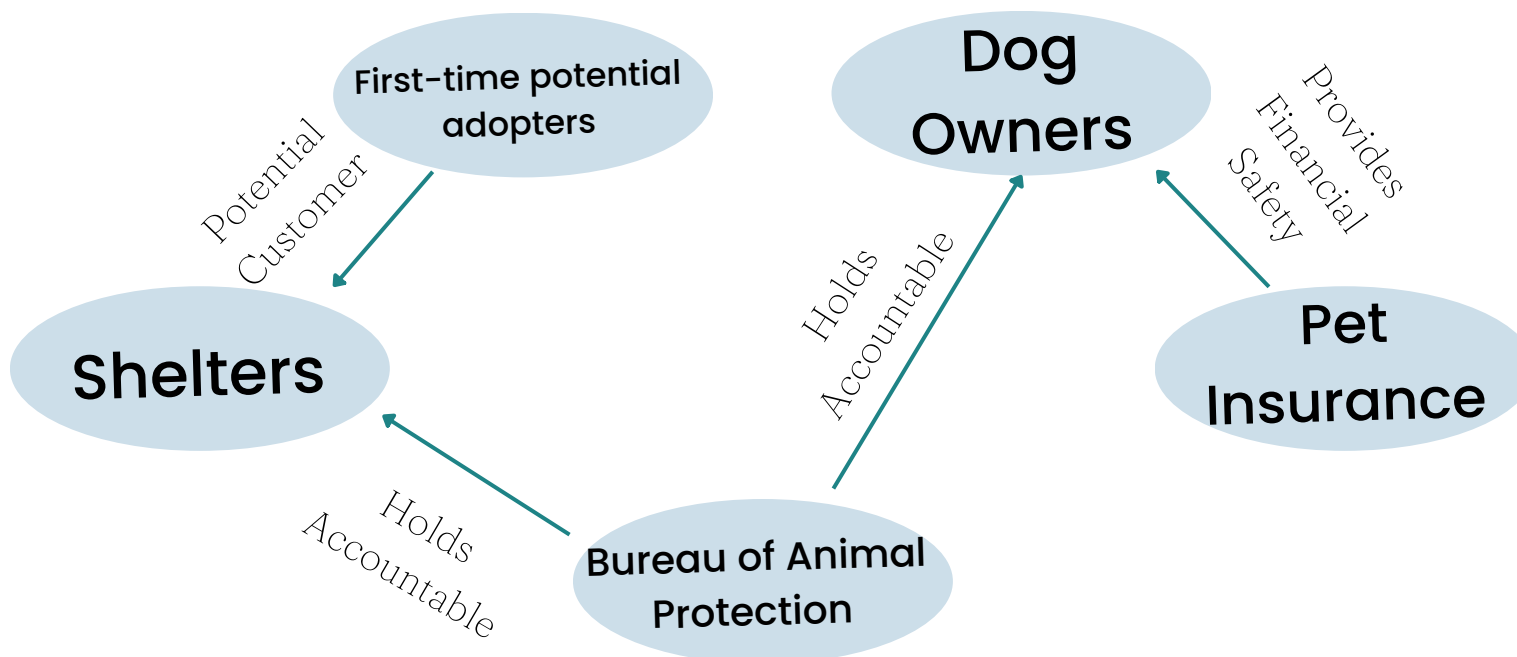
Insights

- **Many owners are forced to re-home/return to shelter**
 - For most dog owners, re-homing/returning to shelter is not a result of regret. Instead, it is due to a variety of uncontrollable reasons: the top being financial. When owners choose not to rehome, many of them cannot provide adequate care for their animals leading to legal enforcement surrender to shelters.
- **A fragile economy yields to an increase in sheltered animals**
 - A fragile economy yields to a variety of challenges, such as housing instability, inflation, supply shortages, and other difficulties. These economic challenges are having a direct impact on dog owners across America, which in turn is affecting the wellbeing of their dogs.
- **Not enough owners see the benefits of pet insurance**
 - Despite the benefits of pet insurance, many owners remain uninsured due to the lack of knowledge about it. Some find pet insurance to be too expensive, but for many this perception is unfounded. In addition, many dog owners are unaware of the pet insurance offered, the benefits of it, and the process of obtaining it. As a result, they may acquire unforeseen vet costs, often incredibly expensive, that could have been avoided with adequate insurance.
- **Potential, Young Adopters are not prepared to own a dog**
 - An abundance of information online can make researching dog ownership an overwhelming task. Additionally, shelters, including the one I visited recently, do not provide adequate resources and information to first-time, potential adopters on the responsibilities of owning a dog. This lack of guidance and the sheer volume of information available is not correctly preparing new owners for dog ownership once the adoption is done.
- **Young dog owners do not regret getting their dogs**
 - Further research showed this was not the case despite the original data point. Instead, external reasons were ultimately causing owners to re-home or surrender rather than personal.

ERAF



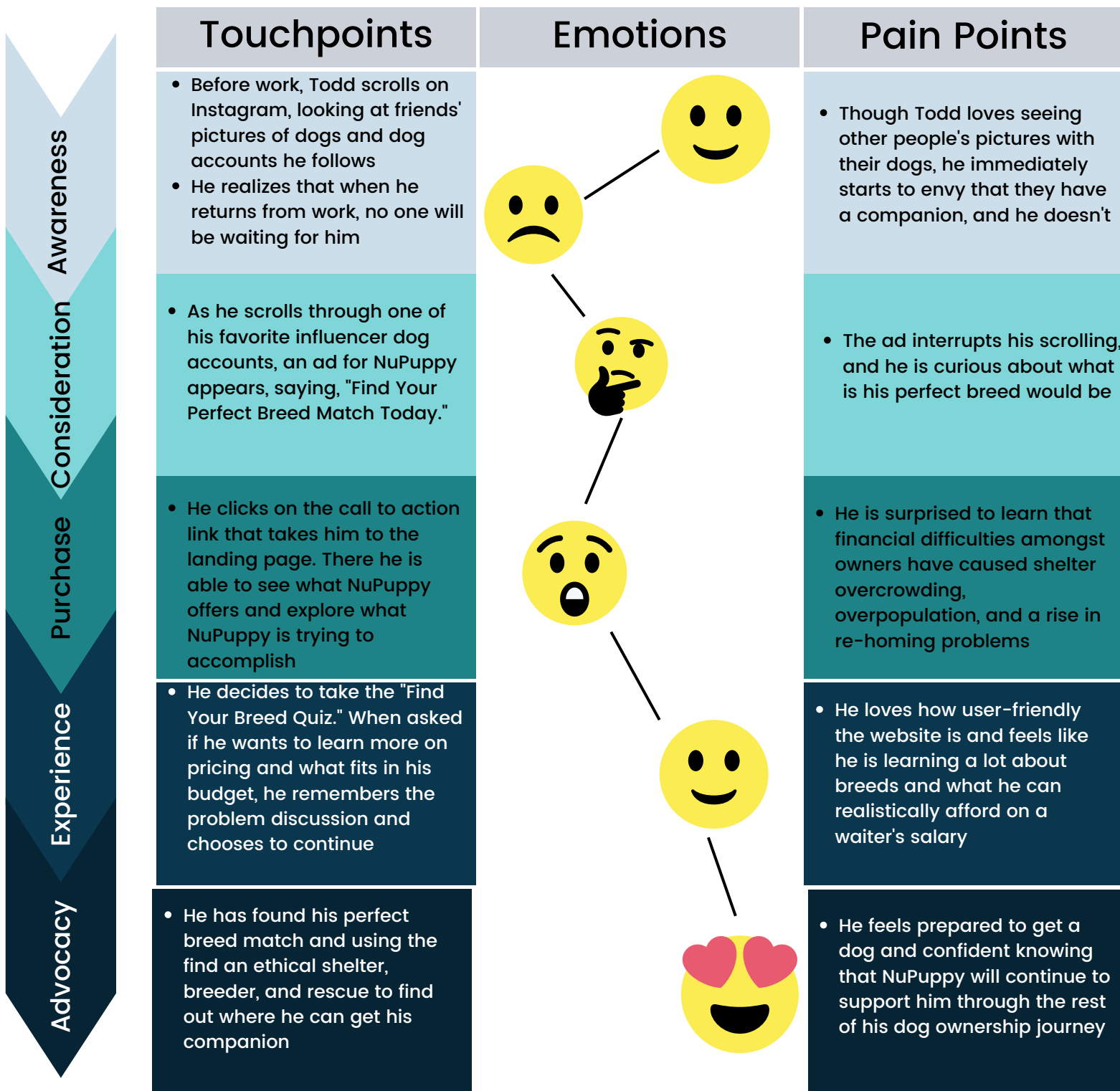
PROSPECTIVE VALUE WEB



USER JOURNEY MAP



Todd is a 25-year-old waiter. He makes an annual income of \$45,000. As a single male, he gets lonely when he returns home after a late night of working. For that reason, he is in search of a furry companion. He grew up with dogs, but he has never owned one personally. He has done little research online and instead is influenced via friends and dog influencers on social media.



APPENDIX SIX

Explore Concepts, Frame Solutions, and Realize Offerings

Questions are moved to possibilities during the final modes, Explore Concepts, Frame Solutions, and Realize Offerings. This marks the beginning of the creative process as potential innovations are discovered. Concepts begin to evolve and discover how they fit into systems defined in previous modes. Aligning concepts with previously identified designs and principle criteria paves the way to a finalized solution. Once a solution has been reached, the next step is to assess how it would function in the real world while integrating all the modes.

As I combined the modes, I kept going back to my personal experience and my initial statement in Sense Intent of how people found sanctuary in dogs during a pivotal and distressing time and realized through my primary research of Knowing People that owners still do. With not one person saying they regret getting a dog, I realized through my secondary research in Know Context that external reasons were what was causing re-homing and surrendering dogs. From analyzing these modes and my Frame Insights, I knew I needed my innovation to do everything I could to prevent people from re-homing their dogs, their best friends, or rather a comfort when returning home from an unknown and ever-changing environment. From financial, unwanted litters, or behavioral issues, I realized that there are resources for all of these. However, they are hard to find unless people do extensive research and filter through an overload of informational websites. So the innovation became clear:

Creating an informative place for first time adopters and dog owners to gather all necessary resources to avoid as best as possible from re-homing or surrendering their dogs.

And that is how NuPuppy was created: An online resource for first time adopters to receive financial transparency and continued access to financial resources post-adoption.

NuPuppy is a user-friendly website that offers comprehensive financial tools and resources tailored specifically for dog owners. NuPuppy provides a comfortable space for users to discover their perfect breed that fits their lifestyle and budget while providing financial support through the rest of the dog's life post-adoption, so no owner has to surrender or re-home their best friend.

With an interactive quiz, AI technology conversations, an affordability calculator, and local resources, NuPuppy ensures that the entire dog adoption process and throughout dog ownership is stress-free, informative and helps avoid re-homing and surrendering. In so doing, NuPuppy strives to eliminate overpopulation and overcrowding of shelters in years to come.

NuPuppy

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