Photographing Their Way to Adoption: A Study of the Impact of Photo Condition on Perceived Adoptability of Shelter Dogs

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Appearance Affects Beholder

- Neotany
- Size
- Color
- Location
- Accessories
• Does photo condition affect potential adopters’ interest in and perceptions of adoptable dogs?
• Does the effect of photo condition vary by breed type?
Method

• Experimental design
  • Exposure to one condition
  • Random assignment to condition

• Online questionnaire
  • Anonymous

• Recruitment
  • Banner on Petfinder.com home page
Photo Conditions

• Consider:
  • Condition: environment, location (inside, outside, cage, room)
  • Quality: focus, background, DSLR or phone camera
  • Composition: close-up or full body, from above or eye-level
  • Dog posture: eyes, ears, mouth/tongue, tail, paws
  • Accessories/props: collar, leash, toys, furniture
  • Dog size, color, breed-type, age

• 4 Conditions:
  • In kennel, in room, in room with person, outside

• 3 Breed Types:
  • Mixed breed, pit bull type mixed breed, black mixed breed
“Lady is a 2-year-old medium-sized mixed breed dog who has found herself at our shelter in search of a forever home. A shelter is no place for this girl, so won’t you please consider adopting her?”
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Condition by Breed Type
Questionnaire

• Intro & photo display
• Interest measures
• Personality measures
• Adoption intent
• Demographics
“Through this project, which is sponsored by Petfinder.com and the Center for Shelter Dogs, we hope to help shelters improve how they display their adoptable pets online. You will be shown a picture of a dog that was previously available for adoption (but has since found a home) and then respond to some questions about the dog featured, the photos, as well as some general background information about yourself.”
Measures

- Appeal of photo
- Appeal of dog
- Interest in getting more info about dog
- Interest in adopting dog
- Likelihood of recommending dog to friend who lives alone
- Likelihood of recommending dog to friend with children <10

- Personality attributions to dog (MCPQ-R*)
  - Extraversion, motivation, trainability, amicability, neuroticism

Likert-type rating
1=not at all___
10=very ____

*Monash Canine Personality Questionnaire-Revised
Ley et al., 2009
2,153 participants reduced to 1,132
956 (84%) female
954 (84%) Caucasian
619 (55%) between ages of 30-59 yrs old
313 (28%) had children under the age of 18 at home
  • 164 (53%) of those had children under age of 10
1,085 (96%) had a dog at one point in their lifetime
  • 730 (65%) currently live with at least one dog; 428 (38%) of these respondents had adopted most recent dog
353 (31%) had no intention of adopting in the next year
  • 779 (69%) plan to within the next 6 months
  • 733 (94%) of those planning to adopt a dog
## Participants by Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo Condition</th>
<th>Mixed Breed</th>
<th>Pit Bull Type Mixed Breed</th>
<th>Black Mixed Breed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kennel</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter Room</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room with Person</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>383</strong></td>
<td><strong>376</strong></td>
<td><strong>373</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,132</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mean Adoption Interest Rating & Recommendation Likelihood Rating by Condition

**Mean Adoption Interest Rating**
- **Kennel**: 4.2
- **Room**: 4.9
- **Room with Person**: 4.7
- **Outside**: 5.1

**Rating vs. Condition**
- *1, *2, *3, *4

**Mean Likelihood to Recommend to Family with Children <10 Rating**
- **Kennel**: 4.8
- **Room**: 5.8
- **Room with Person**: 5.8
- **Outside**: 5.6

*p<0.05*

**Conditions**
- *1* Kennel
- *2* Room
- *3* Room with Person
- *4* Outside

**Legend**
- Blue: Kennel
- Orange: Room
- Gray: Room with Person
- Yellow: Outside

**NCRS 2017**
Mean Amicability Score by Condition

Mean Amicability Score

- **Kennel**: 62
- **Room**: 68
- **Room with Person**: 68
- **Outside**: 68

*p<0.05

NCRS 2017
Mean Adoption Interest Rating & Recommendation Likelihood Rating by Breed Type

Mean Adoption Interest Rating Rating

- Mixed Breed: 5.3
- Pit Bull Type Mixed Breed: 4.2
- Back Mixed Breed: 4.6

Mean Likelihood to Recommend to Family with Children <10 Rating

- Mixed Breed: 6.2
- Pit Bull Type Mixed Breed: 4.5
- Back Mixed Breed: 5.7

Significance:
- *1: p<0.05
- *2: p<0.05
- *3: p<0.05

NCRS 2017
Mean Amicability Score by Breed Type

- Mixed Breed: 70
- Pit Bull Type Mixed Breed: 64
- Black Mixed Breed: 66

*p<0.05

NCRS 2017
Mean Adoption Interest Rating by Condition & Breed Type

NCRS 2017
Mean Recommendation Likelihood Rating by Condition & Breed Type

*p = 0.05

Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine

Center for Shelter Dogs

NCRS 2017
Mean Amicability Rating by Condition & Breed Type

Mixed Breed Pit Bull Type Black Mixed Breed

Kennel Room Room with Person Outside

NCRS 2017
Limitations

- Online survey
- Potential adopters & adopted dogs
- Social desirability bias
- Only 4 dogs
No photos through the kennel!
Optimize composition, location, background
  - Close-ups and eye-level photos are compelling
Adding people can help but pick the right person
Personalization can help – collar, toys, etc.
Video
Sad saps vs happy pets
• Test greater variety of dogs
• Examine influence of collars, leashes, toys
• Explore what potential adopters were drawn to
• Investigate influence of written descriptions
Questions