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Pet wellness becomes underlying theme as industry grows steady

At Anjana's (name changed on request) home, sitting in front of cups of freshly brewed tea, on a fine evening, her boy, Milo, is restless as it is also time for his pedigree snack. The bell rings, and the door opens to the one with a cap that bears Milo's favourite name, the pet shop that delivers their food on a call. The delivery boy waved his hand, and Milo wagged his tail in unison. “Ten years ago, in Chennai, a door delivery of dog food was not even a possibility. But now they deliver any pet product within minutes on a call, says a Chennai based pet parent.” Ms. Anjana gets the food delivered at the eleventh hour; even the fidgety Milo doesn't get time to jump in its impatience.

The accessibility of pet-related products and their grooming has become extensive on dedicated websites for popular pet shops and on any of your favourite ten-minute grocery applications. Tanvi (name changed), a working professional from Bengaluru, has a folder of applications like PetBacker, PawSpace, etc. on her phone, dedicated to her cat. “A plethora of applications started appearing on app stores and became a part of my life within a few years.”

A search for a pet product on any application gives unending scrolls for you and drools for your pet. A pet parent like Ms. Anjana, who has been raising a pet for over a decade and conveniently orders food and services for their pet, would definitely trace back the beginning of abundance roughly five years ago. What would have resulted in this affluence? Is it an organic growth or a sudden boom? The COVID ‘booster.'

The time when people were on a run, booking, trying to book, or finding no luck in getting a booster dose of the COVID vaccine, one of those that handily got a boost was the pet industry. According to data from Tracxn, the pet industry hit a high in the year 2021, exactly the year people were facing hurdles financially, physically and mentally. In that year, 76 pet startups were launched in India. Higher than both the preceding (66 startups) and the following years (50 startups).

Pramilesh, one of the founders of Pandora Pet Mall in the Kozhikode district of Kerala, says that his team, seeing the trend in 2020, foresaw the boom that was around the corner, and chose the beginning of 2021 as the right time to enter the pet market. Being located near his ancestral village, knowing most of his clients personally, Mr. Pramilesh could easily analyse the surge. “Most of the new pet parents were those who had to move to work-from-home mode." For many who were confined to four walls, pets became therapeutic mentally.

According to Dr. Soorej. K, the founder of Cochin Pet Hospital, Kerala's first private multi-speciality veterinary hospital, after the COVID outbreak, with the newfound affection for pets, the trend of 'teacup breeds' has also upturned. Dr. Soorej says that people preferred breeds like Shih Tzu and poodle dogs, and Persian cats that could be raised inside their flats during that period.

Even though this surge was witnessed around 2020, the pet industry has always been one with a steady and stable growth. Since 2010, when Dr. Soorej started his hospital, according to him, the industry had an undisturbed and steady growth till 2020, which was in immense turbulence during the COVID period. "I don't think such a sudden spike like this again won't be a good thing, as many pet parents abandoned their pets after the COVID lockdown period; thus most of the infrastructure and mechanisms that were brought in by the industry lay unused after the expeditious hike. The situation of every other industry that hit a high is almost the same." He says even the organic growth of the pet industry has been so stable that those who get even a nominal piece of the pie can earn a huge lot. "This industry will continue with this same stable growth as people look up to pet care irrespective of times."

The IBEF data on India's pet-care industry proves Dr. Soorej has a right prospect as it projects a sevenfold growth from a ₹30,434 crore valued industry in CY 2024 to a ₹2.1 lakh crore one in CY 2032. The estimated growth rate is an impressive 20%.

A 'wuff' revolution : As Dr. Soorej says, those restricted inside the homes were the breeds that people looked out for when they worked from home. Sarah Cherian, a business developer with Zoho, says she wanted a companion to push through the one year that she worked from home during COVID.
"A conventional image of dogs was of a ferocious one that takes care of your home. But the work-from-home culture brought about a change in people's attitude." A "wuff" is what people liked more than a shuddering growl that dogs stood for.

With great cuteness comes great spending. Exotic breeds of dogs and cats are ardent fans of exotic food. "My cat would give you a deadly stare if you go with a bowl of 'Drools'. On a sniff of it, her look tells you 'no, this is not my food." Ms. Tanvi talks about her Persian cat, Bella. From the data by IBEF, pet food contributes to the largest share of the industry, which was valued at ₹4,000 crore in CY 2024. According to Euromonitor, the food market of the country is expected to hit ₹10,000 crore by CY 2028.
From abundance to abandonment "Many queries were received on pet donation post COVID; the reason for most of the cases being the going back to regular office work," says Mr. Pramilesh.

An amateur dog breeder, Ranjith K.J. has seen people buying and increasingly raising "stud dogs" during the COVID lockdown, to benefit the increasing demand for puppies. "After the demand hit a low, people started to somehow avoid the 'stock' that they had." Dr. Sooraj has seen people selling Shih Tzu puppies for ₹5,000, which were, at times during lockdown, being sold for as much as ₹60,000.

A tremendous trend of pet boarding and pet adoption surfaced during this period. Dogs of Madras, a pet adoption service based out of Chennai, talks about witnessing a striking hike in dog adoption rates five years ago. Most of them were due to the same reason Mr. Pramilesh mentioned. "Around 2024-2025, we have seen a lot of re-homing requests," team Dogs of Madras says. It was the time when they hosted pet adoption drives regularly. Relocation to work, according to the team, was one of the biggest reasons people give up their pets. They lose the once-achieved interest in taking responsibility for a pet.

Pet boarding has increasingly become an essential service for most of the pet parents. Many, who live alone and found a safe haven in petting dogs and cats during the lockdown, had to extensively use the service of pet boarding to leave their dogs for hours when they leave for the office, or for days and weeks when they leave the city for work.

B.K. Cyndia, who runs an NGO in Chennai that fed dogs on the streets during COVID-19, started a pet boarding service that would help fund the NGO and found good business after this period. "Many pets that we have here are of those who moved abroad, and to a different city, and some who rescued animals from the streets keep their pets here for a long period and pay a certain amount, asking us to take care of them.”

Health care and pet insurance

According to Dr. Bharanidharan, a senior veterinarian at The Ark 24 hrs Veterinary Clinic in Chennai, the price of advanced machinery for diagnosis and higher health care has plummeted lately. “Five years ago, many machines that cost as much as ₹7-8 lakh have now the price has come down to ₹3-4 lakhs.”

“The basic idea of price fall due to increased competition works here also. Many human health care companies invested in pet health care as well when the demand surged; thus, this price control happened,” says Dr. Soorej. “In Kochi, you can see a huge number of pet hospitals in a small locality.”

“The shift in the culture of raising dogs has resulted in the attitude towards pet care. They almost become a family member. This calls for more careful and advanced treatment of pets, which is more expensive,” says Dr. Soorej. “Expensive treatments like hemodialysis, laparoscopic surgery, keyhole animal birth control, etc., are offered nowadays for pets like dogs and cats.”

Here comes the relevance of pet insurance, which is a brand new idea even to long-time pet parents. Even one of the top players, Bajaj Allianz, started in the year 2021. Amarnath Saxena, the Chief Technical Officer of Bajaj General Insurance says that they launched the product in 2021, seeing the people increasingly see their pets as part of the family. “This shift has naturally led to higher spending on their health and well-being,” Mr. Saxena adds.

Dr. Soorej's Cochin Pet Hospital is all for the idea that the increasing cost of maintaining and treating the pet demands pet insurance. Many hospitals, including Cochin Pet Hospital, now raise awareness with their clients about pet insurance. “A premium that starts with an annual premium of just ₹1700 saves a lot of money that the pet parents don't realise they spend”.

“Pet parents, seeing the pets as family members, specifically ask for the novel method of health care, like key-hole birth control surgery, instead of the conventional open surgery,” says Dr. Soorej. The steady growth of Bajaj Allianz pet insurance reflects the pet parent's passionate interest in providing top quality health care. “Since the launch, we have seen a consistent increase in customer adoption.

“Overall, the portfolio has recorded a CAGR of approximately 20%, reflecting the growing awareness among pet parents about the importance of protecting their pet's health,” Mr. Saxena adds. “Pet insurance is a category that makes strong financial sense, and its growth prospects are promising.”

Saying that the pet industry has a steady and impressive growth ahead, with it having new branches like pet insurance growing afresh, the future also depends on many other external factors, like COVID-19, which once made a commotion in its core.