



Opinion.

The 'Puguccino' has a bitter taste.

Fads are nothing new. For years they've driven the sales of Rubik's cubes, Tamagotchi's and fidget spinners, only to enjoy their 5 minutes of fame, and be left on the shelf to gather dust. The latest craze is different though, and it worries me. In the past year, ownership of brachycephalic dog breeds has reached an unprecedented record high, and French Bulldogs are now the most popular dog breed in the UK.

'Pug cafés' are the latest manifestation of the brachy-mania to plunder my social media; from Shoreditch to Nottingham and Liverpool, the pop-up coffee shops attract droves of snorting pooches and their fanatical owners. Even if you don't go, you'll be sure to see a smattering of photos of your friends who are there. And they're in good company too; David Beckham and Kelly Brook are the latest in a long list of celebrities to show off their flat-faced dogs online. A recent survey found that almost half of vets believed that clients who choose brachycephalic dog breeds are swayed by social media

or celebrity idols. Big brands are well aware of this too. Costa Coffee and Three mobile and countless others have all used short snouts to promote their products. Pugs and Bulldogs are no longer the ridiculed oddities they once were, so it isn't surprising that they're enjoying a surge in popularity.

Animals bring people together, and that's always special. But it's the dogs I fear for here. Pugs and Bulldogs, more than ever, are developing serious respiratory problems because of their increasingly extreme facial features. An increasing demand for dogs with flatter faces means that brachycephalic dog breeds have been bred far too quickly for the rest of their body to catch up, and it is seriously reducing their quality of life. In fact, brachycephalic dogs can expect to live three years less than those without such features. Their fame has come at a cost to them.

Can't everyone can hear how Pugs labour themselves around? Well, no, actually. 60% of owners of brachycephalic dog breeds don't recognise that their animal is experiencing respiratory difficulties. Perhaps they don't know that they should listen. It would be obvious in any other breed, but Pugs and Bulldogs seem to be immune. In the eyes of most people, these symptoms have become characteristics of these breeds. The big 'puppy eyes' and rolls of blubber are cute, and we're suckers for that kind of thing. The neotenic features of their puppy complex blend their obvious breathing problems into one adorable blur.

The BVA has a strong stance on the issue. Its weekly publication, the 'Veterinary Record' recently announced that they would no longer publish adverts that use brachycephalic dogs to sell their products. It's a brave move, and more publishers need to do the same. Changing the media portrayal of brachycephalic dogs, even if the audience is mainly vets, is the start of convincing the world. The BVA's #BreedtoBreathe campaign aims to do just this: to advise the public on what it really means to have a brachycephalic dog. It encourages vets to engage with owners and carry out pre-purchase consultations. The official statement writes the scripture that tells vets how to communicate with owners about the brachycephalic problem. It gives a platform for advances to be made on, and I'm sure that this is just the start. Starting within professional publications, the nationwide media has catch on and change the way it influences owners.

It's a start, but nobody ever changed the world by tweeting about it. To address the root of the problem, we have to consider regulating dog breeding, or brachycephalic dog breeds could soon hit the point of no return. Recent changes to the law cracked down on puppy farming and have seriously improved the lives of many breeding animals. Though it feels like a missed chance to licence breeders and have a direct say on who breeds dogs, and in what interest. You'd be hard pushed to find a group that actively lobbies the government in support of this, and it's hard to envisage a future where brachycephalic features improve without it.

The writing is on the wall for brachycephalic dog breeds, and we need to act fast to change that. Progressive improvements to hereditary conditions requires responsible actions from everyone, and that means targeting the right people: vets, the media, and those sipping a latté at the Pug Café.