

Consumer Attitude and Involvement Towards Pet Clothes: A comparative Study of Chinese and Non-Chinese

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Abstract: A rising number of pets and the increasing market for pet products in China has necessitated a study into the consumer attitude and involvement towards pet apparel. A survey on the consumer attitude and involvement towards pet apparel was carried out. A total of 166 Chinese, 69 Americans and 114 other foreigners respondents were involved in the study. The other foreigners were of several nationalities which included Romania, Canada, Italy, Australia, Japan, Singapore and Zambia. The data collected in this research indicated that for the non-Chinese consumers, gender, age and income did not affect the purchase of pet apparel. For the Chinese consumers, the results showed that while gender and income did not affect the purchase of pet apparel, age of the consumer however affected the purchase of pet apparel. The results of the research indicated that the attitude of the Chinese consumer towards pet apparel is driven by fashion and aesthetic properties (fun) while that of the non-Chinese especially the Americans placed more emphasize on the functionality of the pet apparel.

Keywords: Slaughterhouse waste; cationization; cotton; reactive dyes; proteinous products

1. INTRODUCTION

The behavior of a consumer towards a given product can be influenced by several factors which include attitude, involvement, culture, lifestyles and product attributes. The consumer's attitude can be divided into three main components; effect, behavior and cognition (Schutte & Ciarlante, 1998, Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). A person's attitude represents a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular object, and can serve various motivations (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). According to functional theory, since attitudes may serve various motivations depending on the purpose, behavior is therefore a function of

attitude toward that behavior (O'Keefe, et al., 2002). On the other hand, according to dual attitudes perspective, people may possess (simultaneously) both an implicit and an explicit attitude, even opposite in valence, toward the objects, people, and issues that are important in their lives (Schooler, et al., 2000).Based on the above-mentioned considerations, it may be important to study if the consumers attitudes toward pet apparel is greatly affected by the importance of human being place on pets. An extension of such a study will be to consider whether the consumers attitude can be measured by the amount of money spend on pets, pet products and services.

The ownership of pets and the amount of money spent on pets and pet products is on the rise.

The “humanization” of pets is a continuing trend, whereby pets (particularly dogs and cats) are increasingly cared for according to human patterns and human aesthetic standards (Tashiro & Rowley, 2007). According to Tanikawa (Tanikawa, et al., 2004), any generation that has failed in raising their children, pets serve as a filler to cover up the void. This could explain the drastic increase of pets in Asia. The economy of most of Asian nations have recorded high growth, while at the same time aggressive government policies have let to fewer children being born. These factors could add up to give rise to an increase in pet ownership. Pets are considered as friends and companions that provide psychological comfort. In increasingly hectic and stressful societies, pets represent security and comfort and have long been recognized as a source of emotional support. Animal companions are more popular with empty-nesters, single professionals and couples who delay having children. People who do not have children find comfort and emotional satisfaction dressing pets instead (Roberts, et al., 2010). As people get to a point of finding companionship in pets (Zhuang, 2005), the needs of the pets come to the fore. Some pets like dogs are given shelter and clothing to protect them from extreme cold or hot weather. Pet clothes may include items to cover the pet and hence keep it warm, or to shield the pet from the hot sun. Although pet clothing has been around since 1950 in big cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Paris

and London, it was mostly regarded by the general public as a peculiarity or extravaganza in celebrity, fashion and rich peoples’ life. The overall statistics for spending on pets’ related products and services in general are on the increase. In the U.S.A, where the pet industry was worth \$32.4 billion in 2003, there are more pets than human beings. The market that combines the sale of live animals, pet care and supplies and veterinary services grew to its current size from about half that level 10 years ago, and it serves about 378 million pets, most of them cats and dogs, compared with 290 million human beings. According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, which compiled the statistics, American pet owners are expected to spend \$34.3 billion on pets in 2008 (Tanikawa, et al., 2004). In China the pet population has grown by a 20% in five years, from 240.8 million in 1999 to 291.4 million in 2004 (Wines, 2010) and attitudes towards pets are changing in China’s fast-paced economy.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitude and involvement of consumers toward pet apparel in general, consumer attitudes toward pet apparel shopping, individual differences, cultural differences and demographic factors for consumers of pet apparel in China and other countries. A questionnaire was developed to collect data on the attitude and involvement of consumers towards pet apparel both in English and Chinese. Two strategies, on-site and online, were employed for gathering data in China and other countries. In

Shanghai, China and Birmingham, Alabama, U.S.A, questionnaires aimed at both pet owners and non-owners were distributed. The questionnaire was also posted on the web. The website address was popularized through different social networks. The web link was active for a two-month period; April to May 2007. The questionnaire was designed with two sections; the first section introduced the research being done to the participants through a cover letter which asked for their contribution. The second section was subdivided into two sections A and B. Section A, part 1, to be completed by all participants, covered the attitudes, knowledge and opinions of consumers, pet owners or not, towards pet clothing. Twenty-two questions were included in this section to provide a better understanding of new life trends and attitudes towards pet apparel. Part 2 of section A was specifically geared towards pet owners aiming at investigating their purchasing behavior: actual as well as intended apparel purchase, degree of satisfaction and evaluation of pet apparel. Participants having completed section A, part 1 and did not own a pet were invited to go straight to section B. This last section, B, required socio-demographic data and included questions on education, household income, age and gender. Sections A, part 1 and 2 required participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statements developed on a five-level Likert scale which had the following levels; 1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neither agree nor disagree, 4: Agree and 5: Strongly agree. The data collected was analyzed

using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 15.0 (SPSS).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Sample Characteristics

The sample population consisted of 166, 69 and 114 Chinese, Americans and other foreigners respectively. The other foreigners were from Romania 32, Canada 12, Italy 7, England 6, Russia 6, Turkey 5, Germany 5, Sweden 5, Holland 4, Austria 4, Spain 4, Australia 4, Singapore 3, Korea 3, Japan 3, India 3 and Zambia 2. Statistical analysis was conducted using cross tabulation and Chi-square to study if there existed any significant difference between pet apparel purchasers/ non-purchasers across countries and gender, age, income. The chi-square test should indicate whether or not the variables depend on each other and the extent to which they do. A statistically significant p-value of 0.05 was used in this study. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for Chinese and non-Chinese consumers' purchasers and non-purchasers of pet apparel. As seen in the Table 1 a higher percentage of the Americans purchased pet apparel, followed by the Chinese.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for respondents

Purchase	Chinese		Americans		Others	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
No	107	64.5	41	59.4	82	71.9
Yes	59	35.5	28	40.6	32	28.1
Total	166	100	69	100	114	100

After cross tabulation and chi square was conducted the results (Table 2) showed that there was no significant relationship between the purchasing frequency of pet apparel on one hand and gender, income and age on the other hand for non-Chinese consumers. That means gender; age and income did not affect purchasing of pet apparel. The same case applied for the Chinese consumers concerning gender and income. For the Chinese consumer age and frequency of purchasing pet clothes showed a correlation. The younger Chinese tend to more, while the older Chinese recorded lower levels of purchasing pet clothes. The young adults between the age of 21-30 years with a monthly income of C¥12,000 - C¥60,000 (US\$2000 - US\$10000) recorded a very high purchase frequency when compared to the older people (over 60 years old). That is to say the purchasing frequency showed a drastic reduction as the ages increased.

Less than 20 years ago, Chinese consumers could only satisfy their most basic needs. Being affected by traditional Confucianism, older people wanted to be modest and did not like to stand out from the crowd. The drastic change in the Chinese economy has brought in a lot of changes. The close family unity is no longer

Consumer Attitude and Perceptions toward pet apparel A study of the consumer attitude toward pet apparel was undertaken using a questionnaire. Some of the keys points captured in the questionnaire and response are given in Table 3.

The results indicated that Chinese consumers and non-Chinese consumers both had a positive perception of pet apparel. All the respondents maintained due to the fact the young find themselves in new cities far from family members. Coupled with the stress of work and the availability of disposable income, the young adults are more prone to indulge in new ideas (like pet ownership) which might give them emotional satisfaction (Jeanne, 2009). For the non-Chinese, the people who embrace the pet culture seem to carry it from Childhood to old age. Parents buy pets to keep the kids occupied when they (parents) are always away at work. As the kids grow up and leave home, the parents buy pets to fill the emotional void left. In old age the pets become some of the closest companions.

Table 2 Chi-Square tests for gender, age, income

	Factor	Nationality	Value	Degree of freedom	Sign
Pearson Chi – Square	Gender	Chinese	1.605	1	0.205
		Americans	2.914	1	0.088
		Others	0.422	1	0.516
	Age	Chinese	13.5	4	0.009
		Americans	1.935	5	0.858
		Others	3.86	5	0.57
	Income	Chinese	3.728	3	0.292
		Americans	2.111	3	0.55
		Others	7.341	3	0.062

(Chinese and Non-Chinese) felt that pets should be treated as family members. Out of seventeen key issues considered in this study, the response of four issues was not significant, which means that there was no major difference among the three different groups. The four issues were (i) Whether pets should be treated as members of the family (ii) The source of the information about pet clothes being from the media (iii) Natural fibers are more preferable for use in pet clothes and (iv) The importance of price while buying pet

clothes. The other thirteen issues as listed in Table 3 were adjudged to have registered significant differences among the groups and can therefore be used to explain the consumer attitude and involvement towards pet apparel. The attitude of the Chinese consumers is much higher than that of the Non-Chinese in the following areas (i) The importance of the dressing pets (More Chinese believe dressing pets is important) (ii) Pet clothing are for fun (iii) A desire to buy pet clothes after seeing other peoples' pets wearing clothes.

Table 3 Differences in perception and consumer attitude toward pet apparel

SN	Questionnaire statement	Mean Chinese	Mean Americans	Mean others	Chi-Square value	Sign
1	Clothing for pets is important.	3.27	2.54	2.66	36.286	0.00
2	Pet clothing should be for protection against the weather.	3.01	3.93	3.9	50.39	0.00
3	Pets clothing should be for fun and dressing up.	3.68	2.38	2.64	67.615	0.00
4	Pets should be treated as members of the family.	3.94	3.9	3.94	0.19	0.091
5	Purchasing pet clothing is extravagant.	2.93	3.9	3.25	16.413	0.00
6	Pets should wear clothes in any season.	3.2	3.52	2.5	27.149	0.00
7	My knowledge about pet clothing comes from many different media.	2.92	2.84	3	0.975	0.614
8	Seeing other people's pets wearing	3.57	2.65	2.38	86.218	0.00

	clothes makes me want to buy pet clothes					
9	Natural fibers are preferable for pet apparel.	3.45	3.14	3.38	3.031	0.22
10	Pet clothing should be marketed in the same way as clothing for people.	3.49	1.97	2.81	50.019	0.00
11	Style and color are important for pets.	3.69	2.38	2.68	56.954	0.00
12	Functionality is important in pet clothing.	3.69	4	3.84	6.068	0.048
13	Design and quality are important in pet clothing.	3.78	3.22	3.32	8.048	0.018
14	Pet apparel should be viewed as fashion.	3.3	3.43	2.54	33.23	0.00
15	Pet apparel should have the same variety in style and size as clothing for humans.	3.87	2.49	2.74	72.576	0.00
16	I would be willing to visit an exhibition for pet apparel	3.53	2.38	2.81	50.018	0.00
17	I would be interested in purchasing a magazine about pet apparel.	3.07	2.54	2.32	67.095	0.00

The aforementioned attitudes could have lead to other attitudes and perceptions where the Chinese consumers are more strongly convinced than the Non-Chinese. More Chinese than Non-Chinese feel that style and color are important for pets hence pet clothing should be marketed like human clothing. The Chinese respondents also believe that pet clothing should have the same variety in style and size as cloths for humans. This could be due to the fact pet clothes are for fun and an occasion for the pet owners to show off. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise when more Chinese were reported to have responded that design and quality are important for pet clothes. The Chinese seem to have a strong desire to dress up their pets to a point that they are ready to learn more about pets by visiting exhibitions and buying magazine about pet clothes. In China, pet apparel is a newly emerged trend and it has to do with considerable pet ownership increase in

China and other Asian countries in the last two decades. Despite the fact that it is a new trend in China, the consumers here have a positive perception of pet apparel and are very open to more information and knowledge. Also, Chinese consumers are much more influenced by other consumers' behavior and social reflection when buying apparel for their pets. Most non-Chinese consider pet apparel should be functional first and foremost. When not intended for protective purposes, they consider pet apparel as a fashion and extravagant item. Pet Apparel Consumer Involvement The consumer involvement with pet apparel was captured using questionnaires. The responses to some of the key issues in consumer involvement with pet apparel are given in Table 4.

All the respondents showed strong agreement with the two facts (i) Pet clothes are for functional purposes (ii) Purchase of

pet clothes is easier done in a store rather than online.

Chinese consumers' involvement with pet clothes is higher than non-Chinese

consumers' involvement in pet apparel. This could be due to the economic changes in the Chinese economy, and the one child policy implemented by the Chinese government.

Table 4 Differences in pet apparel consumer involvement

SN	Questionnaire statement	Mean Americans	Mean others	Mean Chinese	Chi-Square value	Sign.
1	I enjoy dressing up my pet in fashionable	2.29	2.16	3.49	34.586	0.00
2	I take as much care in picking out clothing for	2.17	2.24	3.7	44.377	0.00
3	The main reason my pet wears clothes is for warmth and/or protection from the weather.	3.51	3.57	3.26	5.02	0.081
4	For me, dressing my pet is a kind of hobby.	2.17	1.84	3.43	46.828	0.00
5	I buy many articles of clothing for my pet.	2.12	1.9	2.9	26.172	0.00
6	When people complement me on my pet's clothes, it makes me feel good.	2.95	2.6	4	35.619	0.00
7	Price is not important to me when buying clothes for my pet	2.1	2.25	3.08	26.135	0.00
8	My pet wears special clothes for different holidays.	2.33	2.18	3.33	26.479	0.00
9	When I purchase clothes for my pet, I take my	2.73	2.82	3.41	8.027	0.018
10	I frequently buy accessories to go with the outfits I buy for my pet. (Hats, footwear, etc.)	1.68	2.06	3.09	46.7	0.00
11	I consider myself a picky shopper when it comes to clothes for my pet.	2.44	2.35	3.24	14.996	0.001
12	I buy name-brand clothing for my pet.	1.93	1.88	2.59	18.454	0.00
13	When buying clothing for my pet, I prefer plain, functional clothing over clothing that is more elaborate	3.2	3.06	3.21	0.275	0.872
14	I prefer shopping for pet apparel in a pet store rather than online.	3.51	3.38	3.41	0.701	0.704
15	Clothes that I have bought for my pets influence my friends to buy clothes for their pets.	2.43	2.6	3.14	13.427	0.001

The Chinese were more interested in pet apparel and bought more articles for their pets, including special accessories and special clothes for holidays. They were more open to knowledge, information and they enjoyed dressing up their pet as a hobby. Also, for the Chinese consumers,

having a pet and dressing up a pet is very much a social experience, something they would like to share with others in the community. In summary the term "Dressing dogs is more of the person than the dog" can be aptly applied (Serpell, 2009).

The harsh economic situations the USA and the western economies could have lead to less involvement between humans and pets in the non-Chinese study group (Lawinski, 2008). As people find themselves in dire financial situations other luxuries like pets have to be shed off. This could explain the less involvement for the non-Chinese with pets (Taylor, 2008). Just as a decreased human involvement with pets and pets items like clothes could be due to harsh economic times for the non-Chinese (Hansen, 2011), the increased involvement of the Chinese in pets and pets items like clothes could be due to the booming economy in China.

4. CONCLUSION

A survey on the consumer attitude towards pet apparel was carried out among 166 Chinese, 69 Americans and 114 other foreigners. The other foreigners were of several Nationalities which included Romania, Canada, Italy Australia, Japan, Singapore and Zambia. The data collected in this research indicated that for the non-Chinese consumers; gender, age and income did not affect the purchase of pet apparel. For the Chinese consumers, the results showed while gender and income does not affect the purchase of pet apparel, age of the consumer affected the purchase of pet apparel. The results of this research indicated that the attitude of the Chinese consumer towards pet apparel is driven by fashion and aesthetic properties (fun) while the non-Chinese especially the Americans tend to place more emphasize on the functionality of the pet apparel.

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