


A close-up photograph of a person crouching down to pet a dog. The person is wearing a brown jacket and blue sneakers. The dog is wearing a blue and white patterned boot on its front paw. The background is a blurred green lawn and a grey paved surface.

# Pets Dress in Fashion



The old adage that says, “pets resemble their owners” has evolved into a new interpretation: owners express themselves through their faithful companions. This is what reveals a recent research carried out by Universidad del Rosario in collaboration with universities in Spain and Australia.

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In the age of social media and image worship, celebrity postings featuring their pets wearing the latest fashion trends are common pets, not their owners! When entrepreneur Paris Hilton broke into the haute couture events accompanied by her elegant chihuahua, these faithful companions climbed to the category of luxury accessories for celebrities and society in general. Thus, they practically became an extension of the style and personality of their owners.

The pet fashion industry has reached a surprising level of sophistication and profitability. Large houses such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Versace, Fendi, Hugo Boss, Moschino and Zara, among others, have launched lines of luxury garments and accessories designed exclusively for our pets to wear at all times the most *fashionable* trends. Hilton even launched her own clothing brand inspired by dresses paraded on the red carpet of the Academy Awards, in canine versions.



This trend of dressing pets, particularly dogs and cats, which may have started as an eccentricity of the so-called high society, has quickly gained ground in Colombia and the world. A report by the [Federación Nacional de Comerciantes \(Fenalco\)](#) indicates that the sale of pet clothing and accessories in the country showed a growth of 15 percent in the first half of 2023. This is not surprising considering that nowadays pets are usually considered as just another member of the family.

In the pet market, particularly for dogs and cats, you will find outfits and accessories for all occasions: gala, street, costumes, beach, winter, etc., ranging from the most common materials to the finest fibers and rhinestones. Surely, if the canines spoke they would say

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 “The more the pet is perceived as an attachment figure, and the stronger the attachment, the greater the tendency to dress the pet as a human.”

wow before so many options; however, sometimes aesthetics quarrel with the comfort of four-legged friends.

According to data from the Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (Dane) ([National Administrative Department of Statistics](#)) (Dane, by its acronym in Spanish), 67 percent of Colombian households have at least one pet, whether they are dogs, cats, or even more exotic species such as pigs, birds, lizards, and rodents.

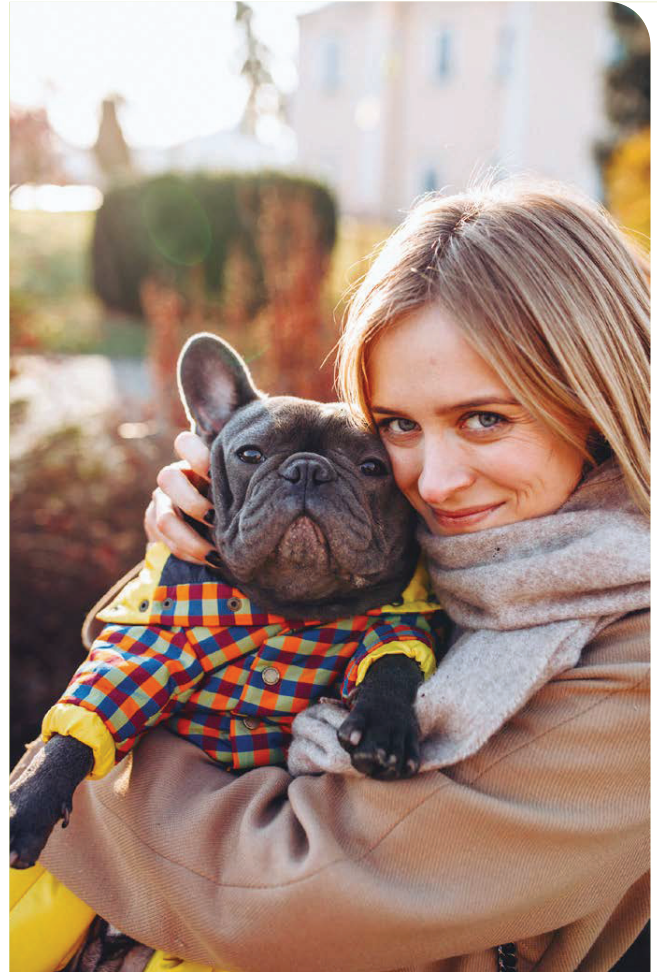
The figures of [Fenalco](#) specify that the pet market in Colombia has grown 84.9 percent in the last 5 years and ranks fourth in Latin America as a leader in the sector, behind Brazil, Mexico and Chile, in production and consumption of pet products with an annual growth of 13 percent. According to the newspaper [La República](#), during that same period, Colombians invested around \$3 trillion in food and pet items, and this figure is expected to reach \$5 trillion by the end of 2023.



“From a marketing perspective we use study variables such as emotional attachment, self-expression and anthropomorphism to build a model that can explain why people buy fashion clothes or some distinctive symbol for the pet; in addition, we try to explain a little our relationship with pets,” explains Professor Mario Paredes from the School of Business Administration, an expert in consumer behavior .

To understand the motivations behind this global phenomenon, a group of researchers of [Universidad del País Vasco](#) and [La Trobe University](#) (Melbourne, Australia), in conjunction with the [School of Business Administration](#) at Universidad del Rosario [Mario Rolando Paredes Escobar](#), conducted the study “*What motivates consumers to buy fashionable clothing for pets? The role of attachment, the anthropomorphism of pets and self-expansion.*”

This is a pioneering research on consumer behavior in pet fashion and for its development, 326 online surveys were applied to a representative sample composed of Australian pet owners, and an experimental evaluation was carried out with 203 university students. The publication on this qualitative analysis sheds light on the reasons that drive the growing demand for fashion products for pets, which contributes to strengthen the literature on consumption symbolism and the influence of attachment in this peculiar form of expression.



## ‘Human friendly’ trend

Some factors such as the pandemic or the tendency of new generations not to have children but pets have promoted the sale of products and services for them, for example veterinary consultations, hotels, shops, spa, schools, funeral services, hairdresser, exclusive parks, clinics with medical specialties (ocular, oncology, diabetes, dental, psychology, etc.). These new family members are now allocated a good portion of the budget to meet their needs, allowing the growth of this increasingly ‘humanized’ market. Today we speak of “multispecies families” where pets, according to the Chamber of the Superior Court of Bogotá, “ceased to be considered as things, but did not lose their property status within the legal system. Now they are also identified as sentient beings on whom it is obligatory to apply special protection duties.” In summary, the trend of viewing these animals as “human friendly” has not only transformed the pet industry but has also redefined the very notion of what it means to be a family today .

### The 'Fashionable' Universe of Pets and Their Owners

Regardless of the type of garments, an inevitable question arises: Do pets really need clothes and should they follow *fashion* trends? Paredes believes that pets do not need clothing, let alone fashion. He argues that the usefulness of garments is limited to specific climatic situations and in particular dog breeds, since the concept of fashion is exclusively human. "Although some garments may be uncomfortable, they usually do not affect the well-being of pets," she says.



"From the perspective of *marketing*, we use study variables such as emotional attachment, self-expression (image that is projected through the pet) and anthropomorphism (giving human characteristics to something that is not human) to build a model that can explain why people buy fashion clothes or some distinctive symbol for the pet; in addition, we try to explain a little our relationship with pets," explains the teacher, an expert in consumer behavior with a postdoctoral degree in Economic Sciences.

Understanding these variables and their interrelationships from a scientific perspective will allow a better use of knowledge.

With respect to the first mentioned variable, it has been shown that a high level of attachment entails greater emotional and monetary investments. Paredes emphasizes that "the strong [bond](#) between people and pets, it can be perceived as a source of unconditional love, acceptance and emotional support, even to the extent that pets can play the role of children, siblings, playmates and friends. The more the pet is perceived as an attachment figure, and the stronger it is, the greater the tendency to dress the pet as a human."

To measure this variable, approaches were analyzed such as: "I feel closer to my pet than many of my friends"; "I have a photograph of my pet in my wallet"; "I feel closer to my pet than some members of my family"; "my pet is my closest companion."

Self-expression through the pet is another variable explored in the study. The famous expression "pets resemble their owners" takes on a deeper meaning as assessed, considering how owners project their image through their pets. Paredes argues that choices of breed and clothing for pets are extensions of the owners' social behavior, of their lifestyle; it is a way to send messages about themselves. Additional studies, such as that of social psychologist [William J. Chopik](#), support this idea by stating that dogs tend to reflect the personality of their owners: "A quiet person will have a quiet dog."

Consequently, to determine the level of self-expression, the group analyzed instruments such as: "Can I project a good image of myself with my pet", "with my pet my friends perceive me as cooler," "with my pet I have more status"?

They also included whether there were plans to buy pet clothing in the coming

## The World of Pets in Numbers

At least the **43 %** of Colombian households have a pet. The most common are dogs (70%), birds (15%) and cats (13%).

Colombians spend between **COP 190 000** and **COP 745 000** per month on their pets.

The value of the pet industry in the country was **3 billion COP** in 2016. By 2026, it will be **6,1 trillion COP**.

In 2022, the pet food category alone billed about **1,2 trillion COP**, up 23% from the previous year.



Sources:  
Data taken from Kantar Ibope Media, National Federation of Traders (Fenalco), Dane and NielsenIQ.

Colombia is the fourth largest pet market in Latin America, behind Brazil, Mexico and Chile. This had a growth of 84.9% in the last five years .

months or whether there would be a willingness to buy it.

Anthropomorphization is the third key variable in the study. Have you ever engaged in a conversation with your pet in the hope that he understands you rationally? Do you consider him your “*dog-child*” or “*gatchild*”, or do you give him the status of brother, nephew, grandson? Did you see him in trendy clothes? Do you celebrate birthdays with cake and guests? These practices reveal the strong affective bonds between owner and pet, while diluting the line between human and animal behavior.

The teacher emphasizes that “the more the pet is perceived as an attachment figure, and the stronger this attachment is, the greater the tendency to dress it as a human; therefore, to buy fashionable clothing for pets.”

### Practical Vision for Market Growth

From a marketing standpoint, these findings are critical to understanding consumer behavior and designing attractive and effective strategies in the growing pet fashion industry. “Highlighting concepts such as the family in which the pet is included, customizing garments that give it identity or organizing contests for the best-dressed or disguised pet are some powerful strategies for entrepreneurs to promote the consumption of these products, because this way people will feel greater identification and expression through their pet,” Paredes suggests. Clothing and accessories for pets at home have not only become consumer products, but also a form of expression and emotional connection for their owners. Far from being an extravagance, fashion for company species becomes a tangible expression of the love and connection we share with our furry faithful friends. ■