

From Pets to Influencers: Examining Species Equivalence and Agency in Pet Fashion of Tika and Bodhi

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Abstract:

Pet fashion has seen an exponential growth in the twenty-first century, expanding well beyond traditional leashes, collars, and name tags to include high-fashion clothing, accessories, and furniture. This burgeoning culture has given rise to pet influencers: animals with substantial social media followings, particularly on Instagram. These pet influencers, often dogs, cats, or rabbits, highlight pet fashion trends, endorse products, and share their activities through their owners, referred to as pet parents. This phenomenon has gained significant momentum post-pandemic, fostering a new level of indulgence among the younger population, who increasingly regard pets as family members. This shift is evidenced by the purchase of exclusive clothing and the creation of mini-me looks to express adoration and love for these new family members. Such practices cater to the trend of pet humanization, prompting questions about the implications of dressing animals in human-like fashion. This paper aims to explore whether the trend of pet fashion represents a step towards a posthumanistic view of species equivalence or if it diminishes the agency of animals. This study examines the social media accounts of prominent pet influencers, Tika (@tikatheiggy) and Bodhi (@mensweardog). It aims to determine whether pet dog fashion contributes to erasing the boundaries between human and non-human or if it intensifies the fetishization of humans through the theoretical frameworks of posthumanism and bioethics.

Keywords: Pet Fashion, Pet Influencers, Species Equivalence, Agency, Human/non-human Binary.



Introduction

The contemporary landscape of pet fashion reveals a striking crossover of consumer culture, digital media and the evolving relation between humans and animals. Pet fashion has boomed into a multimillion-dollar industry consisting of *haute couture* clothing, luxury accessories, designer furniture and customized belongings reflecting human fashion trends from the earlier simple practical designs of collars and leashes. A crucial development to this transformation is the rise of pet influencers. Pet influencers are animals with substantial social media followings whose curated imagery and branding promote new norms of pet ownership, affection and performative aesthetics.

This phenomenon of pet influencer culture rooted in digital culture, leans towards the hyper-visibility of pets as both fashion subjects and content creators. Online platforms, particularly Instagram, have enabled animals to emerge as cultural icons, involving followers through emotional appeal and brand collaborations. Relying on the sentimental value of pets, the scope of fashion has grown significantly among pet influencers. This trend, accelerated by the isolation endured during the pandemic and the growing emotional investment of the younger generation in pet parenting, indicates a broader cultural shift towards the humanization of pets through fashion or perhaps the posthumanisation of pets. Here, posthumanisation refers to a theoretical shift away from anthropocentric perspectives, recognizing pets not simply as domesticated animals but as emotionally-aware beings who take part in the digital and social lives of human beings. This approach highlights the deep interconnection between human and non-human actors, that promotes a more fluid and relational understanding of subjectivity.

This paper aims to investigate the implications of this shift. Does pet fashion, with the omnipresence of digital media, redefine what it means to be an animal and foster a posthumanistic re-evaluation of species boundaries? Or does it represent an extension of anthropocentric commodification, where animals are used for human desires? This study seeks to position the pet fashion phenomenon within the context of posthuman theory, species agency and digital performativity by critically analyzing the

social media content of two globally recognized pet fashion influencers, Tika and Bodhi.

Historical Overview of Pet Fashion

The phenomenon of pet fashion has a long historical precedence owing to the close companionship between human beings and animals, particularly dogs. Though pets consist of a wide range of species, dogs were a crucial factor such that the history of pet fashion coincides with the history of dog fashion. Its origin can be traced back to the ancient civilizations. In Egypt, decorative collars date as far back as 3500 BCE; in Greece, pet accessories were common by the 5th century, and in Rome, ornate and protective garments for dogs appeared around the 1st century BCE to 1st century CE (Mark; Priya).

In its nascent form, pet fashion essentially comprised of dog collars, signifying ownership to humans and a mark of identity. These collars were often made from materials such as leather, gold, silver, and sometimes bejeweled with precious stones (“Dog”). Notably, archaeological findings from the tomb of King Cuo of Zhongshan, include dogs wearing gold collars decorated with silver and turquoise accents. It dates to the Warring States Period between c. 475 to 221 BCE (“CULTURE”). In ancient Greece, protective gear such as steel armor was worn on dogs, apart from collars, when it participated in war or hunting by 5th century BCE (Zhang). It was used to safeguard dogs from injury which indicates their significance to human beings. Similar practice of using collars and leashes was observed in Rome and Mesopotamia too.

The investment in pet apparel reflects the growing significance of pets in human lives, giving rise to a new fashion sub-genre known as pet fashion. The rise in this phenomenon has its roots in the affection and security humans derive from their canine companions. Interestingly, there have also been historical accounts that reveal criticisms of societal attitudes toward the prioritization of pets over children. For instance, around 46 BCE, Julius Caesar admonished such behavior, offering the earliest commentaries on how keeping pets might reflect misplaced emotional investment. His remarks highlight the cultural tensions surrounding the role and status of pets in human life (Nelson).

During the Middle Ages, dogs increasingly became the companion animal and a stamp of prestige among the upper classes. In the Victorian period, elite men often carried dogs, which served as a reflection of “loyalty”, “strength” and “nobility”, during social gatherings and travel (Amato 25). Pet fashion also underwent a change in the use of materials which began to incorporate wool, leather and fur. These materials, drawn from other animals adds an ironic layer to pet fashion, where one animal’s body becomes decoration or protection for another. Fur and leather, particularly, reveal the complicated dynamics of human-animal hierarchies and the way power and luxury are symbolically displayed. These garments, rather than having a purely functional purpose, often become status symbols, reflecting the high-fashion trends of elite human society. With the advent of the industrial revolution, the scope of pet fashion diversified to include cotton and synthetic fibers, indicating changing economic spectrum in spending for pet fashion (Zhang).

In the nineteenth century, casual clothing for dogs began to take shape, allowing them to wear outfits throughout the day rather than only for specific occasions. With this development, pet fashion began to diversify, offering a wide variety of garments suitable for different events, much like human fashion. In Paul Mégnin’s 1952 work *Nos Chiens*, it is noted that dogs were provided with distinct outfits for various occasions, including evening wear, travel, and beach outings (Nelson). Pet owners often personalized their dogs’ beach attire by inscribing the names of the dogs on name tags. The range of canine apparel expanded to include embroidered coats, traveling cloaks, silk jackets, and tea gowns, as highlighted by Alfred Barbou in his book *Le Chien: Son histoire, ses exploits, ses aventures* published in 1883 (Nelson). However, this trend also attracted the attention of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which raised ethical concerns regarding the implications of dressing pets (“Should”).

The twentieth century marked a significant shift in pet fashion, as clothing became increasingly stylish and often modelled after human attire. The materials used for dog clothing diversified to incorporate synthetic fabrics such as polyester and nylon, which offered durability, ease of maintenance, and a variety of patterns and

styles (Zhang). In 1959, New York City hosted the first fashion show dedicated to pets, a development that gave rise to a new profession of pet couturiers, who designed custom clothing for dogs (Priya).

The twenty-first century witnessed an unprecedented expansion in pet fashion encompassing *haute couture*, specialized furniture, luxurious housing, specific diets, and other commodities. Celebrities played a crucial role in elevating pet fashion, with Hollywood figure Paris Hilton leading a trend by promoting her relationship with the dog, Tinkerbelle (Szymczak and Fraser). During the early 2000s, Hilton popularized the act of carrying her dog, sometimes in designer handbags, turning the pet into both a fashion accessory and a media icon. This visual trend of carrying dogs became symbolic of luxury and glamour. It gained traction not only through traditional celebrity media but also through emerging platforms like MySpace and later Instagram, where stylized pet photography and curated pet lifestyles began to flourish. The dog's stylized appearances in media sparked a new segment in pet culture of dressing dogs, leading to a proliferation of designer pet boutiques and fashion designers specializing in pet fashion. The inception of National Dress Up Your Dog Day in 2009 was another event that fostered the ties of pet culture with fashion (Ingraham).

Presently, the pet market has extended beyond the sale of pet animals and food to include pet clothing and other indulgent luxuries. Pet owners engage in such practices as spending more on pet apparels suggests greater care and love toward the canine species. Pet fashion and pet accessories have also flourished on online marketplaces, with platforms such as Ssense.com offering a wide array of products. The emergence of pet influencers on social media, particularly Instagram, has magnified the trend of pet fashion influencing the purchasing decisions of pet parents.

Rise of Pet Influencers

Pet influencers are a new breed of social media influencers comprising of animals with large followings on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The most popular among these influencers are dogs and cats, followed by birds, reptiles and other less frequent pets including rabbits and hedgehogs (Maumelat). These accounts are maintained by pet parents, individuals who own pets and consider pets as

their children or family. They share videos and photographs of their pets engaging in different activities including daily routines, playful antics, unique personalities, and skills which communicate an engaging story of pet life to the viewers. The posts may also include tips on pet fashion, pet-grooming, pet-friendly lifestyle and suggestions on pet-friendly travel places including hotels, restaurants and tourist destinations (Bhardwaj). These public forums may be more popular than the accounts of their human counterparts.

Instagram plays a key role in shaping the rise of pet influencers. As a platform centered on visual storytelling, it enables users to create dedicated accounts for their pets. Often, these accounts speak through the pet's imagined voice, further blurring the line between human and animal identity. According to Maddox, this form of content creation goes beyond entertainment, as it can also function as “joy as resistance” (3337). Many people engage with pet content as a way to escape the stress, negativity, and pressures commonly found on social media. Sharing images of adorable pets offers comfort and creates small moments of happiness for both creators and audiences. However, this joy is deeply embedded in what Maddox calls the “cute economy” (3334), a system where emotions, attention, and pleasure are monetized or leveraged for social influence. For fashionable pet influencers like Tika and Bodhi, Instagram turns their curated looks into content that can generate visibility and, at times, financial gain. In this context, Instagram is not merely a passive platform but an active force in shaping the culture of pet fashion. determining how pets are portrayed, celebrated, and even commercialized in the digital landscape. Some of the factors indicating the popularity of the pet influencers are their perception as adorable creatures, capacity to instill positivity and their role as sources of moral support apart from a refreshing form of entertainment (Vogl).

The content of pet influencers also consists of awareness and educational matter related to animal welfare. They participate in welfare organizations, rescue operations, campaigns to raise awareness about animal shelters, adoption, and responsible pet ownership that involves the well-being of the pets. These influencers also advocate for a healthy lifestyle for pets by promoting content on dietary habits, the importance of

exercise and the establishment of safe environments that can contribute to sound mental health (Bhardwaj). Further, they advise on using sustainable pet practices that minimize environmental harm. They are also at the forefront of commercializing their popularity through brand partnerships, modelling and sponsored content.

Influencer marketing has remained popular due to influencers' high reach among viewers. However, the arrival of pet influencers replacing human beings is a new evolution in this domain. It has been found that people react more positively to pet influencers, as there is higher engagement with content produced by pet influencers than by human influencers. Pets are also perceived as more credible beings than humans, with their inherent cuteness enhancing product credibility and boosting higher purchase intention among buyers (Di Cioccio et al.). According to "Pet Influencers on Consumers," consumers respond more positively to messages on social media when it is narrated from the point of view of pets than humans. This narrative style increases the overall level of audience engagement in marketing products. It is identified that the effectiveness of the message differs depending on the human or non-human narrator (Zhang et al.).

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic on the market, the pet industry has boomed (Kestenbaum). Major brands such as Nestle, Dior and Mercedes-Benz have collaborated with well-known pet influencers like Grumpy Cat, Tika the Iggy and Loki the wolfdog, respectively. Under the broader spectrum of pet influencers, a subcategory called pet fashion influencers has emerged. They are the influencers who prominently feature in stylish attire and share posts on pet fashion.

This evolution in pet fashion raises questions about the boundaries between species, identity, and representation. It has developed from stylized clothing to treading the notions of agency, subjectivity and posthuman ethics. Therefore, understanding how fashion mediates human-animal relations in the digital age is crucial. This paper explores the phenomenon of pet fashion using a qualitative analysis of two major Instagram accounts. It investigates how pet fashion performs species identity, human desire and social capital in the contemporary digital media landscape.

Methodology

Qualitative case study methodology is employed to explore the cultural, visual and ethical dimensions of pet fashion in the digital space. Among the range of social media, Instagram accounted for the availability of vast animal content, as it is a platform for visual storytelling. Thus, two prominent Instagram accounts were selected as case studies, @tikatheiggy and @mensweardog, to examine aesthetic trends and symbolic practices in pet fashion culture. These accounts exemplify the pet fashion influencer phenomenon due to their exclusive fashion themed content. A purposive sampling strategy involved collecting 30 posts per account during the period between January 2021 and December 2023. This timeframe marks the post-pandemic surge in pet culture visibility and influencer marketing. The selection criteria included posts featuring distinctive clothing or accessories, participation of dogs in fashion-related events, brand collaborations and their involvement in anthropomorphic or symbolic representation. These posts were analyzed through visual semiotics, discourse analysis and posthumanistic ethics which shall be discussed further in detail in the following sections.

Case Studies: @tikatheiggy and @mensweardog

To critically explore how pet fashion mediates identity, aesthetics, and ethical representation in digital culture, this section presents two prominent pet influencers, Tika the Iggy (@tikatheiggy) and Menswear Dog (@mensweardog). Their curated Instagram personas provide rich material for examining anthropomorphism and social symbolism.

As of May 29, 2025, one of the most popular pet influencers Tika the Iggy, has shared 1,156 posts and garnered a staggering 1.5 million followers on Instagram. Tika, an Italian greyhound owned by Thomas Shapiro, is known as a fashionista and appears in her social media account in diverse clothes, that showcases high-end pet fashion. The dog promotes various brands and is primarily a pet fashion influencer known for donning *haute couture* items. The account bio mentions the dog to be addressed as she/her, and *Vogue* magazine has described Tika as “[a] new fashion it girl.” Her wardrobe includes everything from beach dresses and tracksuits to cowboy outfits. Tika has conducted a fashion tour visiting several cities across the United States of America

and Canada. In many posts, the dog recreates the looks of various female celebrities, including iconic outfits from the Met Gala, an annual fundraising event for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute in New York, known for its extravagant fashion. Tika has also attended the Pet Gala, a television show hosted by singer Dolly Parton that features a runway show for dogs. Tika has a published book titled *Tika the Iggy: Lessons in Life, Love and Fashion*. As a pet influencer and celebrity, she was seated in the front row of popular Canadian singer Céline Dion's documentary premiere. Apart from fashion events, Tika is also a front-runner of LGBTQIA+ rights and is described as a gay icon in her Instagram bio. She is often seen in VIBGYOR clothing and attending functions that support diverse sexualities. Tika has made an appearance in *RuPaul's Drag Race* in 2015, participating in a gay parade, and marking Pride Month by wearing clothes indicating a pride flag. She was also invited as a surprise model for the Cashmere Collection to raise breast cancer awareness and collaborated with Jared Leto to promote an album. These public appearances reveal how pet influencers like Tika are not just styled for aesthetic appeal but are also used to represent and promote broader human social values such as LGBTQIA+ pride or charitable causes. In this way, the fashion choices imposed on pets extend beyond cuteness and entertainment, they become tools for communicating cultural messages. The media visibility and attention showered on pets position them as credible product ambassadors within the influencer economy.

Bodhi, another pet fashion influencer with social media account named Menswear Dog has shared 1,104 posts and has 3,70,000 followers on Instagram. The dog is owned by David Fung and Yena Kim and belongs to the Shiba Inu breed. Bodhi performs as a model for men's fashion, featuring tailored suits, jackets, and minimalist wardrobes, often mimicking editorial fashion photography. He has been the face of the front page of major magazines, including GQ, VICE, The New York Times, and CNN. The Instagram page shows the dog as an invited guest for the fashion show of Lost Pattern NYC. The dog is also seen to replicate or spin a new take on fashion in films. It is often seen that the dog is represented as an erect figure while displaying men's fashion, mimicking human masculine poses. This represents a deliberate performance

of humanness through visual codes that replicate not just aesthetics but gendered and behavioral norms. He has also collaborated with prominent brands such as Nike Capsule, Casper, and Bergdorf Goodman. Additionally, Bodhi has published a book titled *Menswear Dog Presents: The New Classics*. Books by pet animals further consolidate their role as aesthetic subjects with curated voices. These texts, while authored by humans, create the illusion of non-human authorship, questioning where human projections end and animal agency begins.

Dressing the Other: Pet Fashion, Anthropomorphism, and Symbolic Assimilation

The findings from the case studies of Tika and Bodhi highlight how pet fashion serves as a potent site for negotiating the boundaries between species, identity, and symbolic performance. Humans have developed and fostered a set of specific marks of identity in demarcating themselves from other forms of being. This includes concepts of the ability to use language, being altruistic, and wearing clothes. Though newer studies and research challenge each element, it is undeniable that clothes are an integral feature in classifying humans as humans. Vänškä has stated how dressing is a performative act of hominization (“How to Do” 22). However, this identity mark has slowly been transferred to the pet animals, where clothes are donned onto animals, developing a new genre of fashion called pet fashion.

Symbolic Assimilation: Visual Aesthetics and Material Culture

In 1987, the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals categorized pets as “any animal kept or intended to be kept by humans, particularly in their households, for private enjoyment and companionship” (Contreras). Pets, by definition, are domesticated animals. They are raised by humans and are seen as neither a human nor an animal. To be an animal, wildness is expected of them, whereas the behavior of pet animals is trained by the owners or pet parents to transform them into pseudo-human and accommodate them into the family or into the society. Their “behaviour,” “obedience” and “sexuality” are controlled (Vänškä, “How to Do” 25). Pet animals reside in a state of liminality where they are shaped to be like humans and yet retain a part of their animality in them. Vänškä draws parallel between raising children and training dogs through the tool of education to assimilate each of them to

the acceptable social standards (“How to Do” 23). Dogs are trained to polish their innate characteristics to behave in a certain way. Wearing clothes on pet animals can be considered as a way of anthropomorphizing them. Most often, pet fashion is modelled on human fashion.

While analyzing the two popular Instagram account of pet fashion influencers Tika the Iggy and Bodhi, one can infer that the dogs cater to the fashion of humans. Tika is often seen in long-tailed clothes while attending premier events, replicating the women’s *haute couture* fashion of formal events, and Bodhi exclusively modelling men’s fashion in an upright posture. Fashion in animals is used as a tool to develop relatable factors between humans and animals. The boundary thins when fashion is used as an element by the pet influencers to engage human interest in animals. These representations arguably serve human spectatorship more than animal self-expression. Haraway calls for a relational ethics with “companion species” (52). However, the commercial stylization of pets using fashion reduces them to aesthetic commodities. Here, pets are not being considered on the same rung of the ladder as humans, but are being reshaped to reflect human values.

While visual aesthetics and narrative framing dominate pet influencer culture, the materiality of pet fashion deserves closer attention. The fabrics used to dress pets, particularly inspired by high fashion, reveal complex symbolic and ethical implications. Tika, for instance, is often styled in garments that echo luxury human fashion, such as faux fur, sequins, and silk. These are chosen more for visual impact than comfort. Bodhi’s wardrobe, by contrast, features tailored suits and wool coats made from tweed, leather accents, and cotton blends, which are materials historically linked to masculinity and elite status. This practice raises ethical tensions, especially when animal-derived materials like wool or leather are used to dress another animal, turning pets into both wearers and representations of another species’ labor. Dressing one animal in the by-products of another amplifies the objectification of both, positioning the pet’s body as a site for performing human taste, class, and ideology. In this way, material becomes more than fabric; it becomes a medium of species hierarchy and symbolic appropriation.

Language and Voice

While analyzing the Instagram pages of Tika and Bodhi, it is noticed that captions and writings on the reels are from the perspective of the dogs. Language, in particular, is a key site of human exceptionalism, often considered a defining attribute of humanity. When pet influencers are made to “speak” through captions written in the first person, they symbolically inhabit human consciousness. This technique enhances emotional engagement but also raises ethical questions: Is this a celebration of pet identity or a projection of human identity onto animals?

Beyond the visual aesthetics of pet fashion, the captions accompanying posts on Tika’s Instagram play a crucial role in constructing her symbolic humanization. Through discourse analysis, it becomes clear that language reframes Tika not just as a styled animal but as a fashion persona with agency, taste, and social affiliations. The use of first-person narration, such as “I’m a covergirl!” (January 7, 2021) or “I’m so honoured to be the first four-legged @DiorBeauty Girl!” (April 19, 2023), gives Tika a voice, transforming her into an active participant in fashion and celebrity culture. These narratives extend fashion into the realms of identity and emotional expression. For instance, “[y]ou know what does keep me warm [...] my @shaniatwain-inspired hooded cape” (March 31, 2021), signals not practicality but cultural reference and glamour. Likewise, “[t]here’s no other person I’d rather celebrate #GalentinesDay with than @drewbarrymore” (February 15, 2022) embeds Tika within gendered rituals and celebrity networks. The caption “You can’t spell ‘Gay Icon’ without LGBTIKA!” (May 18, 2022) most clearly merges fashion with queer identity politics. These linguistic choices position the animal body as a conduit for anthropocentric narratives of fashion, fame, and activism, rather than expressions of the pet’s own agency.

Bodhi’s account further illustrates how captions shape the illusion of a socially-aware, emotionally intelligent animal subject. Humorous language and meme-style visuals frame him as a fashion-conscious male figure navigating human experiences. A post from November 6, 2021, for example, features the line “[b]eing stuck in the dog house for a year has been [...] ruff,” with the caption “I have a weird job,” blending canine puns with pandemic-era commentary on work culture. Another post (May 13,

2022) asks “Who wore it better: me or Rembrandt?”, drawing a playful link between pet fashion and Western art history. Posts like “How I’m pulling up on Valentine’s Day” (February 10, 2023) and “Posting a flattering picture of myself to congratulate mother on her special day” (May 15, 2023) anthropomorphize romantic and familial rituals. In line with Vänskä’s view of clothes as a “performative act of hominization” (22), these captions use the pet’s body as a vessel for human storytelling, gendered expression, and aesthetic performance.

Ethics of Inclusion

Even so, pet fashion may peripherally seem like a light-hearted form of aesthetic expression, its entanglement with broader cultural and political symbolism deserves closer attention. Tika’s alignment with LGBTQIA+ symbolism raises critical questions about instrumentalization. Though intended as an act of solidarity, the dog falls outside the dynamics of human sexuality. The use of pride colors and participation in queer events may obscure the animal’s autonomy. Such acts of symbolic appropriation risk inscribing the animal body with human meaning. Interestingly, both these pet fashion influencers have books to their names, giving tips and their ideas around the concept of fashion. This raises questions about whose fashion the discussions are being conducted. Are the pet influencers detailing on the fashion of pets (not animals) through humans, or the fashion of the humans through pets? Here we come to the dilemma on whether fashion is a medium to humanize pets or is it a rightful step towards species equivalence.

Yet, pet fashion holds deeper emotional and functional significance. Research shows that people with strong emotional bonds to their pets are likely to buy clothes for them. Two key factors that influence this behavior are anthropomorphism, treating pets as if they have human traits; and self-expansion, where owners see their pets as an extension of themselves. Together, these factors help explain why pet clothing is often tied to emotional and identity-driven choices (Apaolaza et al.). For many, dressing pets is an expression of affection, identity, and emotional connection, particularly among individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment styles. Beyond its symbolic role, pet clothing also fulfils practical needs. Short-haired or hairless breeds like Chihuahuas,

Italian Greyhounds, and Chinese Cresteds may require winter garments to prevent hypothermia, while older or arthritic dogs benefit from additional warmth. Conversely, cooling vests help thick-coated breeds such as Huskies or Chow Chows manage heat in warmer months. Clothing also protects against environmental hazards, including UV exposure, rain, ticks, and dirt. Items like raincoats, lightweight shirts, and reflective vests enhance both hygiene and safety, reframing pet fashion as an informed act of care as well as cultural expression (“5 Reasons”).

Species Equivalence and Ethical Dissonance

A recurring dilemma in pet fashion is the question of agency. Both Tika and Bodhi are framed as expressive beings, Tika as a sassy “fashion it girl” and Bodhi as a suave menswear model. Nevertheless, their roles are curated by pet parents. The illusion of participation masks the reality that choices are made by humans. This tension resonates with critiques of speciesism. Species equivalence is a key concept of posthumanism and the underlying principle of biocentric ethics. It roots for a perception of all beings considered equally. Human entitlement is negated and the inherent value of all lifeforms is accepted. For instance, the comfort needs of a senior dog or the spatial autonomy of a cat are considered ethically significant in their own right, not merely in relation to human desires. Every being has equal ethical standing. This does not homogenize a standard of equality. Not every being has to come into a single category to have a moral footing in nature. The very difference in the species and the acceptance of difference from one being to another holds for species equivalence. Considering this, pet fashion treads a fine line on species equivalence and possessing their own agency. Clothing that has been fundamental to humans is bestowed upon the pets by pet parents to inculcate the pets into the family. While pet parents may believe they are empowering their pets through visibility and inclusion, such actions often reinforce human dominance, veiled in affectionate aesthetics. Here, the means to accommodate pets as family members in the fashion of humans to show their status as equals is questionable. This idea of pet fashion raises the question whether one is considering all species as equal or are humans trying to equalize by changing the other species to humans?

This discussion parallels feminist critiques of gender performance and normativity. As Judith Butler argues, gender is not a fixed identity but a series of stylized acts, often performed in alignment with dominant expectations (XV). In various media portrayals, female strength is often depicted through the adoption of masculine-coded traits such as wearing trousers, cutting hair short, or rejecting decorative adornment, as a means of gaining legitimacy in patriarchal contexts. Yet, such representations risk reinforcing a binary in which power continues to be defined through masculine norms, thereby marginalizing or erasing femininity. A similar dynamic can be observed in pet fashion. Efforts to equalize pets by incorporating them into human fashion frameworks may inadvertently impose human ideals onto nonhuman bodies. Rather than acknowledging the animal as a distinct but equal subject, these practices risk flattening species difference, reducing animal agency to a performance of human aesthetics and values. As feminist theorists challenge the notion that empowerment stems from assimilation into dominant forms, posthuman and biocentric ethics similarly argue for an ethics of difference, one that honors species distinctiveness rather than subsuming it through mimicry.

The central argument, then, is that pet fashion functions less as a matter of practicality and more as a symbolic gesture, such as Tika being styled for red carpet events or Bodhi being featured in branded campaigns. These performances often serve to project human narratives onto animal bodies, reinforcing anthropocentric ideals rather than recognizing nonhuman subjectivity on its own terms. From a biocentric ethical standpoint, pet fashion is not a choice of pet animals themselves, but a material culture imposed by humans and worn on the non-human bodies. Clothing pets in humanized fashion may reflect love and care, but it also risks displacing the animal's own mode of being. One of the major arguments in favor of pet fashion is that clothes help protect pets from harsh weather conditions. However, studies have often shown that pet fashion is more a decorative piece than a functional element (Vänskä, "Cause" 81). In this case, one needs to focus more on whose pleasure this pet fashion is created for. The ethical question thus becomes: Is pet fashion a celebration of interspecies intimacy, or a form of aesthetic colonization? The answer lies in examining not only

what is worn, but who decides, and for whom it is performed. The current findings suggest that while pets may appear to participate in human society, their participation is heavily mediated and often subordinate to human control.

Conclusion

This study explored the evolving phenomenon of pet fashion as a complex site of cultural negotiation, digital performance, and species boundary transgression. By examining the Instagram accounts of two prominent pet fashion influencers, Tika the Iggy and Menswear Dog, it was revealed how fashion is employed not only as a mode of visual storytelling but as a mechanism of anthropomorphism and human-centric meaning-making. The analysis highlighted how costume, narrative voice, and social media engagement collectively work to humanize pets, projecting aesthetic and social roles onto animals that are largely shaped by human preferences. These curated identities blur the lines between human and non-human, often erasing species-specific autonomy in favor of human dominance.

The paper argues that pet fashion operates less as an expression of care for animals and more as a symbolic extension of human identity, control, and cultural aspiration. On digital platforms such as Instagram, pets are styled, narrated, and presented not as autonomous beings, but as carefully curated projections of human values, aesthetics, and emotions. This anthropocentric framing obscures the agency of animals and raises ethical concerns about the fine line between interspecies intimacy and dominance.

Pet fashion, in a way, is a move to serve the needs of humans. It gives them an additional upper hand when they justify that clothes are created for pets to protect them. However, pet fashion becomes another area where humans stamp over the agency of animals and stray away from the attainment of the species equivalence. Human-animal relations should not involve treating animals as objects for human pleasure, but require acknowledgement from humans of the animality of animals and their being themselves.

While pet fashion may appear to elevate the cultural status of animals, it simultaneously imposes human aesthetics, human causes, and human narratives onto non-human bodies. In doing so, it raises essential ethical questions of whose identity

is being performed, whose voice is being heard and who benefits from the spectacle. By interrogating these questions, this study advances critical conversations in fashion studies, digital media, posthumanism, and animal ethics, revealing how fashion not only constructs identity but also defines the boundaries of interspecies belonging.

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