

Evidence for Ethical Consumption: The Social Network Structure of Companion Animal Fashion and Vegan Fashion

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Introduction

Animal rights movements led to changes in social perceptions toward animals. Changes in awareness of companion animals led to the phenomenon of pet-humanization. Thereby, companion animals are regarded as family members, and as a result, this perspective resulted in the growth of related industries. Annual companion animal fashion shows and companion animal fashion designers are emergent keywords. In SNS, animal models, often called “pet-fashionista” function as fashion influencers. A number of fashion brands are extending their lines to companion animal fashion and selling companion animal fashion supplies.

Increased attention on animal rights extended to vegan fashion. According to the *Economist* (2019), interest in veganism is gaining in recent years, especially among younger generations. Specifically, about a quarter of 25 to 34-year-old Americans identify as vegans or vegetarians. Veganism affects the entire industry, including fashion and cosmetics. Vegan fashion does not include animal products or byproducts, and it uses the non-animal materials or “vegan textiles.” Examples include fake fur/leather, pleather (plastic leather), organic cotton, and other synthetic textiles (Black, 2011). Fur farms are considered to be unethical practices in many countries, and such farms warrant discussion and counterreaction among stakeholders because of animal welfare (Niinimäki, 2015). Animal ethics are largely discussed in the fashion industry as a concept with philosophical foundation. Many luxury fashion brands declared status as fur-free.

In fashion, animals are closely related to ethical fashion consumption. The fashion industry has been known to take priority over animal welfare as it relates to matters of productivity (Rollin, 2006). Ethical clothing is often related to environmental responsibility, employee welfare, slow fashion, and animal welfare. Relatedly, animal welfare groups encouraged clothing organizations to adopt more animal-friendly processes, such as no animal testing and replacing animal furs with vegan materials (Reimers *et al.*, 2016). The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between companion animal fashion and vegan fashion as evidence of ethical fashion practices.

Methods

Raw data for this study includes web magazines, blog postings, and new articles which relate to companion animal fashion, vegan fashion, and ethical fashion. Data were collected through web crawling. A text mining program was used to analyze the frequency and centrality of main keywords. A network visualization program was used. Raw data of about 50,000 words from 2013 to 2018 were collected. Individual network analysis was conducted for companion animal fashion, vegan fashion, and ethical fashion. Then, common network structure was assessed to identify evidence in connection.

Results

Companion animal fashion words were analyzed based on betweenness value. Those words, such as “children,” “family,” “senior,” “baby carriage,” and “friend,” are evidence to support the pet-humanization phenomenon. The high degree value and betweenness centrality value of those keywords include “toys,” “baby carriage,” “name tag,” “harness,” and “dry room.” Words related to vegan fashion include presented similar values of betweenness centrality, closeness centrality, and Eigenvector centrality. Results revealed a close connection between each word. Words were related to environmental factors (upcycling, eco-friendly, organic) and material (mink, goose, fake fur, plant-based).

Common network structures of companion animals and vegan fashion include “human,” “body,” “lifestyle,” “health,” “love,” “organic,” “beauty,” and “animal-friendly.” Words related to luxury brands were also identified as common structures of companion animal fashion and vegan fashion. In addition, “festival” and “conference” were identified as common words related to promotional strategies. The significance is that companion animal fashion companies and vegan fashion companies use similar communication channels. Companion animal fashion is based on attachment between human and animals, focusing on products and services. By comparison, vegan fashion is a more social concept, focusing on animal-cruelty and alternative materials.

Moreover, common network structures of vegan fashion and ethical fashion include “social,” “environment,” “plastic,” “upcycling,” “value,” “culture,” “eco-friendly,” “animal-abuse,” “veganism,” and “practice.” Almost one-third of the vegan fashion network connected to ethical fashion keywords. The result revealed evidence that vegan fashion is a subordinate concept to ethical fashion. This is consistent with the results of preceding studies. However, the network structure of companion animal fashion and ethical fashion did not reveal any connection except for these keywords: “brand,” “animal,” “materials,” “human,” and “organic”.

Consequently, the common network structure of the companion animal fashion/vegan fashion and ethical fashion extracted five keywords: “animal,” “brand-image,” and “materials.” Among those, brand-image (337.83), materials (155.17), animal (81.5) had higher level of between centrality. It means that these were powerful bridge concepts connecting variables. Environment (48.0), and sustainability (19.67) were also common keywords. These five words are the core concepts that make companion animal fashion and vegan fashion to be ethical fashion.

Conclusion

Considerations of whether or not it is morally right or wrong to mistreat animals is a discussion about ethical fashion consumption and ethical discussion. Companion animal fashion consumption and vegan fashion as ethical consumption are based on a philosophy of animal-friendliness. Materials present important factors, and brand identity was an important consideration. Also, prior research supports the result of this study (Niinimäki, 2015). Both companion animal fashion and vegan fashion are rapidly emerging markets. Findings of this research may provide insights for future research directions and implementations.

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