

RETAIL

Pets: The new code to China's luxury fashion consumers

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Pet fashion sales have been booming in China, and luxury brands need to be ready to take full advantage of this trend. Image courtesy of Tiffany & Co.

By [Ashley Galina Dudarenok](#)

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This Chinese New Year was a different experience for many people in China.

In response to the [government's call not to return home](#) during the Spring Festival, many citizens spent Chinese New Year separated from their families and far from their hometowns.

Pets, now regarded as family members by many, provided emotional support, and pet/owner relationships became closer during this time.

As such, dressing pets in nice clothes and taking them out to keep them healthy and show them off became an urgent desire for pet owners.

According to [data from JD.com](#), sales of pet gift boxes increased nine-fold during the Chinese New Year.

Some special pet products for the Spring Festival, such as pet snacks and lucky red pet items, were also popular.

According to [Tmall's top-10 new Spring Festival purchases in 2021](#), Post-90s have become the top consumer group for Spring Festival purchases for the first time. And pet clothing is their target, ranking second only to semi-prepared New Year's Eve dinners in China's thriving pet economy.

Who is buying pet items?

According to the [2019-2020 China Youth Consumption Report](#) from CCTV's finance and economics department, 18- to 25-year-olds are expected to spend 5.89 percent more on pets this year. That is a higher number than those born after 1985 (3.79 percent) and the national average (3.73 percent).

Pet platform PetHadoop's [2020 White Paper on China's Pet Industry](#) tells us the number of dogs and cats in China's urban areas increased by 1.7 percent between 2019 and 2020, exceeding the 100 million mark for the first time.

Meanwhile, the pet product market reached \$31.5 billion (206.5 billion yuan), a growth of 2 percent from 2019.

These numbers show that behind this pet fixation lies a psychological change influenced by culture and business. In urban areas, where work pressures are high, people often have fewer family ties and fewer long-term friends. Many young people have adopted a lack of trust and a strong sense of loneliness, and time spent with a pet heals them and gives them solace.

These youngsters have also become passionate about grooming their pets and dressing them up to display their style and their pets' personalities. Many pursue high-quality, well-designed products so their pet can have a better life and show them how much they care for them.

With pets elevated to family members and companions, the significance of pet ownership is profound.

How do luxury brands focus on pets?

Examples of luxury brands launching pet clothing and accessory lines include Prada's pet down jacket, Louis Vuitton's pet collar, Hermès' pet leash and Tiffany's pet plates.

The products, which range from \$610 to \$4,580 (4,000 to 30,000 RMB), are expensive but popular with many pet owners.

Pets take the spotlight in some promotional campaigns as well.

This January, Louis Vuitton released a video of one of China's top livestreamers, Austin Li (Li Jiaqi), with his five nearly identical poodles.

One of the dogs, named Never, promoted Louis Vuitton's pet carriers. Never was also featured on the front of Perfect Diary's eye shadow compact, which was co-branded with Mr. Li. Once the brand launched its pre-sales in early 2020, 150,000 sets sold in less than 10 seconds.

During Christmas and Chinese New Year, pets become design inspiration and marketing tools for luxury goods.

For example, Prada launched three new pet products for its Christmas 2020 collection, each with different options for different occasions.

Chinese New Year has always been connected to animals because of the 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac.

As such, many brands used unique cow elements in their designs in honor of the Year of the Ox, striving to capture consumer attention during the fierce CNY marketing competition.

Fashion brands cooperate with pet KOLs to create topics, communicate with target users, and encourage viewers to purchase key products. But, above all, quickly grab viewers' attention and hold it, as brands are counting on the dopamine release triggered by cute pets to work in their favor.

Luxury brand values communicated through pet products

Over the long term, brands that use pets to tell good stories will establish a pet-friendly image and win Chinese consumers' goodwill.

Balenciaga's "I Love Pets" T-shirt line promotes the idea of adopting pets instead of buying them.

Valentino's Rockstud Pet bag line can be customized with an image of the customer's pet and the owner's initial, deepening the emotional connection between owner, pet and brand.

Interestingly, different pet breeds have different degrees of popularity in China versus Western countries, and they even have different implied meanings.

The number of cat owners in China increased in 2020 compared to 2019, and cats are becoming increasingly popular pets.

Because of this, for Burberry's Valentine's Day ads in China, the brand shot an advertisement with a Scottish Fold cat, known for its cute folded ears.

But in Burberry's Western ads for its famous B Series, Bulldogs dogs rarely owned in China were the featured pet.

Brands must take advantage of pet preferences and symbolism differently on Chinese and Western social media to communicate with those target audiences correctly.

What will luxury brands do in the future?

The aesthetics of pet fashion depend on the owner's tastes and the brand itself.

Brands can design more products such as pet carriers, beds and clothing to match key elements in their clothing lines. That can increase customer purchase rates and close feelings with pets, but they must fully consider the pet's comfort, functional needs and safety. That is the only way to truly convey pet-friendly values and win the trust of pet owners.

Brands are also likely to provide pet owners with more choices to meet their different needs.

In addition to clothing, traction accessories, collars and food dishes, there are also gaps in the market for more segments. Sustainable, **environmentally friendly** materials and smart products for pets are worth looking at as options.

But luxury brands should also look for suitable pet mascots and models via popular and significant breeds in China.

French jewelry brand **Boucheron** has done well in China in this regard, highlighting its mascot, the **black cat Wladimir**, who also features highly on their **Western digital channels**.

Black cats symbolize auspiciousness in China, and Boucheron has added ideas of freedom and heritage to that legacy. This kind of localization is one of the keys to successful marketing in China.

Additional research by Stella Zhan

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