

# DISSERTATION

## THE ROLE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT ON CONSUMERS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS REGARDING PET-RELATED PURCHASES

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## **Abstract**

This study set out to explore the complex relationship between User-Generated Content (UGC) and consumers' decision-making process regarding pet-related purchases, particularly aiming to answer the research question: "How does User-Generated Content influence consumers' decision-making process regarding pet-related purchases?". To this end, a qualitative research approach utilising semi-structured interviews with twenty Portuguese pet owners was employed to gain nuanced insights into their experiences and decision-making processes. The findings reveal that while UGC is present and viewed as potentially valuable, its overall influence on participants' purchasing decisions is often limited or indirect. Decisions are frequently based on established knowledge, past experiences, the pet's specific needs and preferences, or trusted offline sources such as veterinarians, pet store staff, or known friends and family. The strong emotional bond and the desire to provide the best for their specific pet make owners critically evaluate external information, such as UGC, by assessing whether the content aligns with their pet's individual needs, health, and preferences before being significantly swayed. Additionally, a "sense of duty" was identified as a potential driver for pet-related purchases among participants, motivating owners to invest in products and services even in the absence of a deep emotional connection, a nuance not explicitly explored in the reviewed literature.

**Keywords:** UGC, Pet-Related Purchases, Consumer Decision-Making, Pet-Human Bond

## Resumo

Este estudo teve como objetivo explorar a complexa relação entre o conteúdo gerado pelo utilizador (UGC) e o processo de tomada de decisão dos consumidores no que diz respeito a compras relacionadas com animais de estimação, procurando responder à pergunta de investigação: “De que forma o conteúdo gerado pelo utilizador afecta o processo de tomada de decisão dos consumidores relativamente a compras para animais de estimação?”. Para tal, foi adotada uma abordagem de investigação qualitativa, recorrendo a entrevistas semiestruturadas com vinte portugueses, donos de animais de estimação, de modo a obter perceções detalhadas sobre as suas experiências e processos de decisão. Os resultados revelam que, embora o UGC esteja presente e seja considerado potencialmente valioso, a sua influência nas decisões de compra dos participantes é, muitas vezes, limitada ou indireta. As decisões são frequentemente baseadas em conhecimentos prévios, experiências passadas, nas necessidades e preferências específicas do animal, ou em fontes offline de confiança, como veterinários, funcionários de lojas de animais, ou amigos e familiares próximos. O forte vínculo emocional e o desejo de proporcionar o melhor ao seu animal específico funcionam como um filtro através do qual a informação externa, incluindo o UGC, é processada, sendo os conteúdos avaliados com base na sua adequação às necessidades individuais, saúde e preferências do animal antes de influenciarem de forma significativa a decisão. Adicionalmente, foi identificado um “sentido de dever” como um possível fator motivador para compras relacionadas com animais de estimação entre os participantes, incentivando os tutores a investir em produtos e serviços mesmo na ausência de uma ligação emocional profunda, uma nuance que não foi explicitamente explorada na literatura revista.

**Keywords:** UGC, Compras para Animais, Processo de Decisão do Consumidor, Relação Pet-Humano

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## **Abbreviations**

AI – Artificial Inteligence

UGC – User-Generated Content

eWOM – Electronic Word-of-Mouth

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The pet industry has gained considerable importance in the past few years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many people decided to adopt a companion animal (Sun et al., 2021). In 2023, 72% of Portuguese households owned at least one pet, surpassing the global average of 58%. Additionally, that same year, the Portuguese market size for the pet industry was 630.3M€. This figure, however, is expected to grow to 640M€ by 2024. As for sales, the pet industry reached 612.2M€ in 2023 (Mendes, 2024).

In Portugal, out of the 72% of households that own at least one pet, 61% own at least one dog, and 54% own at least one cat, making these the most commonly kept pets among Portuguese families (Mendes, 2024). Hence, this study will be focused on these species.

Nowadays, pet owners view them in a different light, not only as companion animals but as extensions of themselves or even as their children (Apaolaza et al., 2022; D'Souza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, often delay having children, mainly due to economic reasons, as they argue that their living conditions won't allow them to provide for a child, which leads them to adopt a pet instead. This phenomenon causes them to be inclined to provide better living conditions for their pets, reflected in increased spending on pet-related products, such as food, toys, veterinary care, and so on (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024), expenses that showcase the proximity between owners and their pets.

Purchase decisions are influenced by both emotional and rational (cognitive) values (Rahman & Pial, 2020) and, considering the increased proximity and care people have with their pets, it could be argued that the emotional aspects have a greater effect on the purchase decision and that consumers frequently act impulsively and disregard reason when making purchases (Liu et al., 2024). User-Generated Content (UGC) could be another factor driving this purchase decision. With increased exposure to stimuli from social media and fellow pet owners, people's perceptions of certain products can be influenced by digital creators, even when the information shared is not backed by scientific evidence (Jacobson et al., 2022; Myers et al., 2022).

Despite the industry's growth, there is a lack of information regarding how these factors influence consumers' purchase decisions in this sector. Nonetheless, existing research assesses the motivations that lead people to spend their money on their pets (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2024), the preferred products they choose to buy (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2012), how animal influencers have been gaining online space, how advertising campaigns featuring pets influence consumers (Jacobson et al., 2022; Myers et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023), and even the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry (Kwak & Cha, 2021; Rombach & Dean, 2021; Sun et al., 2021). However, the role of UGC on consumers' decision-making processes when conducting pet-related purchases, particularly in contexts where strong emotional bonds to pets play a significant role, remains understudied.

Furthermore, this research aims to address the following question: “How does User-Generated Content influence consumers' decision-making process regarding pet-related purchases?”.

To this end, qualitative research was conducted, and a group of twenty pet owners was interviewed to understand what motivations led them to buy products for their pets, as well as the influence of UGC on their purchase decisions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Pet-Human Relationship

Humans have domesticated pets for millennia, with dogs believed to be the first species to undergo this process (Ahmad et al., 2020). According to Tancredi and Cardinali (2023), dog domestication most likely started between 20,000 and 40,000 years ago, and occurred in two phases: an initial symbiotic relationship with wolves that were attracted to human settlements, followed by human-directed selective breeding for docile and sociable traits. In contrast, cat domestication began around 12,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent, as wildcats were drawn to early agricultural communities by rodent populations (Nilson et al., 2022). Over time, this mutually beneficial relationship led to increased interaction, which ultimately led to the domestication of cats.

As time passed, these bonds grew, and cats and dogs became cherished participants of human households, not just as companions but as integral family members who provide unwavering comfort and support (Applebaum et al., 2021; McConnell et al., 2019), and these days, owning a pet is often seen as an accomplishment in itself, transcending material possessions (Boya et al., 2012).

Furthermore, numerous studies dwell on the benefits of owning pets, not only for emotional well-being, but also for physical health and social connections. Pets have been found to play a significant role in promoting mental well-being by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression (Martins et al., 2023; Morgan et al., 2020), and research shows that interacting with animals helps counterbalance negative emotions like sadness, anger, and loneliness by fostering feelings of comfort, safety, and emotional support (Martins et al., 2023). Their companionship enhances mood and overall well-being, with pet owners often reporting higher levels of happiness, improved emotional resilience, and even increased life expectancy (Young et al., 2020).

Moreover, pets provide a sense of security and stability during challenging times (Applebaum et al., 2021). Interacting with pets has been shown to lower stress levels by triggering the release of oxytocin, a hormone associated with relaxation and emotional

connection, while reducing stress-related hormones, such as cortisol (Applebaum et al., 2021), with petting an animal or simply being close to one further enhancing this effect by soothing the nervous system and alleviating stress (Young et al., 2020), thereby contributing to an overall sense of well-being and reinforcing the positive impact of pets on mental health.

Given that, many individuals seek solace from their animals during stressful or traumatic events, such as the death of a loved one, finding comfort in their unwavering presence (Young et al., 2020). Likewise, according to Morgan et al. (2020), there was a notable surge in dog adoptions during the COVID-19 epidemic, as many individuals sought companionship to cope with loneliness and isolation while confined to their homes. A combination of pre-existing interest, increased free time, and the emotional need for comfort led many people to choose to foster animals, and online searches for pet adoption skyrocketed (Morgan et al., 2020). With social distancing limiting human interaction, pets became a crucial source of support, offering both emotional relief and a sense of routine (Young et al., 2020).

Beyond providing emotional support, pets play a key role in enhancing social interactions, as human-animal relationships have been linked to improved interpersonal connections by fostering trust, empathy, and respect among individuals (Morgan et al., 2020). Pets, particularly dogs, often act as social catalysts, facilitating conversations and strengthening community ties through shared interests (Oosthuizen et al., 2023). Walking a dog, for instance, promotes physical activity and creates opportunities for casual interactions, thus reducing social isolation (Oosthuizen et al., 2023). Furthermore, pet ownership has been associated with increased social capital, which gauges how connected and embedded a person is within their communities and social networks, as pet owners frequently report stronger neighbourhood connections and a greater sense of belonging (Applebaum et al., 2021). The support provided by pets can even mirror the emotional security found in human relationships, offering companionship that is both unique and deeply fulfilling.

According to Martins et al. (2023), owning a pet, especially a dog, has been associated with increased levels of physical activity, as regular walks and playtime encourage movement and exercise, which in turn contributes to better overall health by

reducing the risk of chronic conditions associated with a sedentary lifestyle. Moreover, by alleviating stress, anxiety, and depression, pets indirectly support physical well-being by preventing stress-induced health issues, such as cardiovascular diseases and immune system imbalances.

Beyond their direct health advantages, pets provide structure and routine, which can be particularly beneficial for individuals recovering from crises or seeking stability in their daily lives (Oosthuizen et al., 2023). Moreover, pet ownership encourages self-expansion, the process of adding new positive attributes to the self, given that pet owners frequently participate in novel activities and experiences through their relationship with their animals, thus promoting personal growth and reducing feelings of loneliness (Ellis et al., 2024a).

The impact of pet ownership depends largely on the strength of the human-animal bond (Ellis et al., 2024b). A deep and positive connection tends to yield greater benefits, though it is also important to recognise that an owner's stress and well-being can influence the emotional and physical health of their pet (Morgan et al., 2020).

In summary, owning a pet offers a wide range of emotional, social, and physical benefits that can significantly enhance quality of life. Their presence not only fosters emotional support and companionship but also strengthens social connections, encourages physical activity, and promotes a sense of stability and purpose, making them invaluable companions in human well-being.

## **2.2. Purchase Decision-Making Process**

The consumer purchase decision process is a fundamental aspect of marketing, as understanding how consumers make decisions is crucial for companies to develop effective strategies (Panwar et al., 2019). While several models attempt to describe this process, one of the most widely recognised is the five-stage model, encompassing problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behaviour (Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006). It is important to note that not all consumers go through each of the stages in every planned purchase, particularly in routine purchases where certain steps may be omitted or reversed (Chaipradermsak, 2007; Kotler &

Keller, 2006; Panwar et al., 2019). Nonetheless, this model is particularly relevant for understanding purchases that require some thought and deliberation (Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Panwar et al., 2019).

The five-stage model begins when the buyer recognises a problem or need (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Panwar et al., 2019). This need may be triggered by internal stimuli, such as hunger or thirst, or by external stimuli, such as an advertisement or the observation of a new product (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006).

Once the need is recognised, the consumer may or may not seek more information (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Comegys et al., 2006; Panwar et al., 2019). Purchases can occur immediately if the need is strong and a satisfactory product is readily available, otherwise, the customer can initiate an information search (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Panwar et al., 2019), that may involve different channels to gather information about available products that may satisfy the need (Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Kotler distinguishes two levels of arousal during this phase: heightened attention, where the consumer becomes more aware of potential solutions, and active information search, where the consumer actively seeks information about different brands, models, etc. (Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006).

Following the information search, the customer evaluates the different alternatives identified (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Depending on the consumer and the circumstances surrounding the purchase, consumers use several evaluation procedures to form opinions regarding different brands (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2006).

After the evaluation phase, the customer rates the alternatives, although the highest-ranked option may not necessarily be the chosen one (Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006). The purchase itself involves numerous sub-decisions, such as product type, brand, location, time, amount and payment method (Kotler & Keller, 2006). In contrast to this deliberate process, there is impulse buying, which occurs spontaneously, driven by emotions and sudden urges (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Comegys et al., 2006).

Lastly, after making a purchase, consumers evaluate both the product and their overall experience (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Comegys et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2006). If the product meets or surpasses the buyer's expectations, they are likely to be satisfied, which in turn influences subsequent actions such as making repeat purchases and recommending the product to others (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Kwak & Cha, 2021; Panwar et al., 2019).

Other consumer decision models include the Stimulus-Response Model, the Anderson Decision Model, the Nicosia Decision Process Model, and the model suggested by Gilbert (Panwar et al., 2019). However, the five-stage model stands out by offering a comprehensive, sequential framework that effectively breaks down the consumer decision journey.

### **2.3. Pet-Human Relationship and the Purchase Decision**

Owners' purchasing decisions are significantly impacted by their relationship with their pets (Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2024), and this complex impact is influenced by several aspects of emotional attachment and how humans perceive them (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2023). As a result, spending often goes beyond essential needs, such as food and veterinary care, to include non-medical services like grooming and bathing, as well as luxury products, such as toys and clothing (Chen et al., 2012).

As previously mentioned, humans often perceive their pets as family members, close friends, or even extensions of themselves (Liu et al., 2024). This perspective fosters deep emotional bonds resembling human attachment relationships (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Ellis et al., 2024a), considering pets fulfil essential emotional needs, providing companionship, support, care, and love (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2024; McConnel et al., 2019; Oosthuizen et al., 2023; Young et al., 2020). As a result, this strong emotional connection translates into a greater willingness to invest in their well-being, influencing purchasing decisions and consumer behaviour (Apaolaza et al., 2022).

One important consideration is the degree of affection shared between the pet and its owner (Chen et al., 2012). Research indicates that the stronger the connection, the more likely owners are to purchase non-essential and luxury products for their pets, such as high-quality toys and grooming products (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012). Anthropomorphising the animal, i.e. viewing it as a human being, partly explains the effect of emotional attachment on the purchase intention of such products, particularly when buying items like fashionable pet clothing (Apaolaza et al., 2022; D'Souza et al., 2023). Additionally, people who have anxious and avoidant attachment styles in their human relationships may grow more attached to their dogs and spend more money on superfluous items, like stylish pet clothes (Apaolaza et al., 2022).

As stated before, many pet owners view their animals as substitutes for children, family or friends, and this tendency to attribute human characteristics to animals influences consumption patterns (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2023; McConnell et al., 2019; Stahl et al., 2023). When pet owners humanise their pets, for instance by treating them like children, they are more likely to spend money on goods and services for them in a similar way as they would for a child. This includes purchasing toys, gifts, medicines and even fashionable clothing for pets (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2023). Moreover, owners who consider their animals as family members are more willing to pay for expensive medical treatments (Chen et al., 2012) and to hold ceremonies, such as funerals, similar to those of humans (Chen et al., 2012). In terms of consumption, this implies the purchase of higher-quality goods for animals (Chen et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the perception that the pet is an extension of its owner's identity significantly influences purchasing behaviour, as pets can be self-reflective, helping owners shape their identities (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). This connection affects both the quantity and type of products purchased, since owners often shop for their pets much like they do for themselves, for instance, by selecting healthy food for both (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012). This self-expansion further amplifies the effects of anthropomorphisation, particularly in the purchase of pet products that convey symbolic meaning, such as fashionable clothing (Apaolaza et al., 2022).

Dogs play an increasing role in satisfying human needs such as companionship, friendship, and unconditional love, and research suggests that dog owners are particularly prone to anthropomorphising their pets (Boya et al., 2012), a tendency that also influences their shopping habits (Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012). Indeed, the growing devotion to pets in the United States has led to a rising trend of humanisation and anthropomorphisation, with animals being increasingly regarded as family members (Boya et al., 2012), a shift that is further reinforced by advertising that appeals to owners' deep emotional attachment to their pets (Boya et al., 2012).

Chen et al. (2012) define interaction as a two-way relationship in which the animal and its owner adjust their behaviour to suit one another, and this mutual adaptation further influences the purchase of products and services that allow for greater socialisation and joint activities, such as training classes and equipment for indoor and outdoor activities. Nevertheless, the owner's willingness to include the animal in their lives and its role in the owner's social network are major elements of this dimension (Chen et al., 2012).

The human-animal relationship also influences owners' consumption values, namely the quality, economy, epistemic value (novelty), and social value of the products and services purchased for their pets (Chen et al., 2012). Consumption values vary among owners based on the significance they place on their relationship with their pets, which is reflected in segmentation studies identifying distinct owner groups with differing levels of attachment and purchasing priorities (Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012). People who view their pets as social mediators, for instance, may seek products that facilitate the animal's interaction with its social circle (Chen et al., 2012).

Like other product purchases, the pet product acquisition process can follow the five-step model, which encompasses the stages of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behaviour (II & Pomazal, 1988).

During the need recognition stage, a pet owner may realise that they need to buy more kibble since the present supply is running short, or they may notice that their pet seems bored and needs a new toy (II & Pomazal, 1988).

Information search may involve reading pet food labels, seeking online reviews, consulting veterinarians or other pet owners, or visiting physical stores to compare products (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Kwak & Cha, 2021). Owners who are more engaged in the process often turn to active research channels, such as print media and the Internet (Chen et al., 2012). In contrast, less engaged owners are more likely to rely on passive media, like television and radio (Chen et al., 2012).

When evaluating alternatives for pet products, factors such as package design, price fairness, brand reputation, and perceived healthiness play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and recommendations (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Chen et al., 2012; Kwak & Cha, 2021). Notably, brand reputation and perceived healthiness have a stronger and more statistically significant impact on recommendations than price and package design (Kwak & Cha, 2021). Furthermore, the influence of packaging design, price fairness, and health perception is more prominent in online shopping, while brand reputation holds more weight in offline retail (Kwak & Cha, 2021).

In the decision-making process for purchasing pet products, owners may face choices like selecting between different food brands, deciding whether to shop online or in-store, determining the quantity to buy and choosing the payment method (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Kwak & Cha, 2021). Preferences in retail selection are also influenced by the relationship with the pet, with owners who place greater value on their pets favouring stores that offer higher quality and a wider selection (Chen et al., 2012). Key factors in retail selection include convenience, affordability, product quality and variety (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Chen et al., 2012).

In the post-purchase phase, pet owners who are satisfied with a pet food brand and can attest to their pet's health and contentment are more likely to repurchase and recommend the brand to other pet owners (Kwak & Cha, 2021). Moreover, positive post-purchase experiences can strengthen brand loyalty (Comegys et al., 2006).

Pet ownership has been linked to increased subjective well-being, helping to reduce stress and loneliness (Chen et al., 2012; Janssens et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2024; Martins et al., 2023; McConnell et al., 2019; Young et al., 2020). Higher levels of well-being may, in turn,

lead to more impulsive purchases of hedonic products, with the positive emotional bond between pets and owners indirectly driving spending on non-essential goods (Liu et al., 2024). The degree of emotional support that pets provide varies, influencing both subjective well-being and purchasing behaviour (Liu et al., 2024). For instance, research suggests that cats may offer greater emotional support than dogs in certain aspects, potentially leading to different purchasing patterns between cat and dog owners (Liu et al., 2024).

In summary, the human-pet relationship significantly influences purchasing behaviour, driven by the strong emotional bond between owners and their pets, the tendency to anthropomorphise animals, the perception of self-expansion, the impact on subjective well-being, and the level of emotional support pets provide (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2023; Janssens et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2024). These factors shape not only the purchase of pet-related products and services but also the broader purchasing behaviour of pet owners, influencing their consumption values, information-seeking processes, and retail preferences and, in particular, their willingness to invest in goods and services for their companion animals (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2023; Janssens et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2024). While purchasing decisions are guided by rational factors such as price and quality, they are equally shaped by strong emotional drivers linked to the deep connection between owners and their pets (Rahman & Pial, 2020).

## **2.4. Digitalisation and User-Generated Content**

Digitalisation has profoundly reshaped retail, including the market for pet products and services, with E-commerce growing at a rate nine times faster than traditional in-store sales, and driving a significant shift in consumer purchasing behaviour (Widmar et al., 2020). As a result, a growing share of pet-related goods, such as kibble and medications, are now bought online (Widmar et al., 2020). Moreover, the integration of technology in pet care and management goes beyond E-commerce by providing valuable health information and enabling the expansion of services such as online veterinary consultations, all of which enhance customer loyalty (Huang et al., 2021; Rombach & Dean, 2021; Widmar et al.,

2020). While traditional remote consultations are often constrained by fixed veterinarian hours and the need for reliable internet access and video conferencing equipment, emerging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data technologies are paving the way for innovative solutions. For instance, prototype chatbots for veterinary consultations are being developed to assist veterinary teams, offering consultation services that alleviate the inconvenience of transporting animals to clinics (Huang et al., 2021).

UGC refers to any form of online content created and shared by users, and it is increasingly influencing consumers' decisions (Geng & Chen, 2021; Shetty et al., 2024). Consumers are becoming less receptive to brands' marketing messages and are seeking out information generated by other users on social media and online (Jannat et al., 2025; Shetty et al., 2024), considering UGC is believed to provide a more authentic and credible perspective on products and services (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Shetty et al., 2024; Shuqair et al., 2016). In fact, 88% of consumers consider online reviews to be as trustworthy as personal recommendations, acting as Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Shetty et al., 2024).

UGC, such as reviews and testimonials from other consumers, promotes brand credibility and the trust of potential buyers (Geng & Chen, 2021; Jannat et al., 2025; Shetty et al., 2024). This is largely because online consumers tend to believe that fellow users, having no direct commercial interest, will offer transparent and unbiased insights that highlight both the positive and negative aspects of a product (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Shuqair et al., 2016).

UGC in the pet market can take a variety of forms, including reviews, descriptions, photos, videos, testimonials and social media posts (Geng & Chen, 2021; Jannat et al., 2025). These different forms of content allow pet owners to gain a comprehensive view of products by seeing them in use by other animals and receiving direct feedback on their effectiveness and quality, which supports them in making purchase decisions (Geng & Chen, 2021; Jannat et al., 2025; Shetty et al., 2024). For example, images of a product shared by users add great value to the brand (Shetty et al., 2024).

Additionally, UGC is considered useful by pet owners in the purchasing decision-making process (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Shetty et al., 2024), as experiences shared by other users can provide valuable information about the benefits, drawbacks and practical use of pet products, helping to reduce the perceived risk associated with purchasing online (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Jannat et al., 2025). The quality and quantity of reviews, as well as their clarity, are important factors that impact purchase intentions (Shuqair et al., 2016). Moreover, UGC acts as social evidence, influencing consumer behaviour based on the actions and opinions of others, given that when other customers buy a product and rave about it, it makes it more likely that more people will do the same (Shetty et al., 2024).

UGC may have a direct effect on how customers see a brand, increasing its perceived value (Shetty et al., 2024; Shuqair et al., 2016). Positive engagement with UGC allows companies to create lasting bonds with consumers, resulting in greater customer loyalty (Shetty et al., 2024). Additionally, customers who feel recognised through their interaction with UGC are more likely to feel emotionally connected to the brand (Shetty et al., 2024). Lastly, UGC can increase consumer engagement by creating a sense of community among users, and conversely, brands can encourage pet owners to generate UGC through contests, rewards, or public recognition (Jannat et al., 2025; Shetty et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, it's important to note that when viewers are aware that a user-generated post serves as commercial content, their response may shift (Jannat et al., 2025). The presence of sponsorship disclosures (e.g., paid partnerships), mentions of money, prominent brand logos, and an overload of sponsored content can diminish user engagement (Myers et al., 2022).

In the pet industry, pet influencers, who are social media personalities centred around pets, have become a powerful form of UGC, significantly shaping pet owners' purchasing decisions, with their content influencing choices related to hotels, restaurants, and tourist destinations, highlighting the growing intersection between pet ownership and digital engagement (Zhang et al., 2023). As the industry expands, more pet owners are creating Instagram accounts for their pets, offering a fresh perspective on the evolving relationship between animals and social media (Zhang et al., 2023). The most popular pet

accounts can have millions of followers, demonstrating their reach and credibility (Zhang et al., 2023).

The decision to follow pet influencers often stems from users' desire for entertainment and interaction with pet-related content (Myers et al., 2022). For brands, these influencers provide valuable opportunities to promote products and services to a highly engaged audience of pet lovers (Myers et al., 2022).

The effectiveness of pet influencer posts depends on several factors, with narrator perception playing a crucial role in how the message is received (Zhang et al., 2023). Posts can be written from either the owner's or the pet's perspective, each shaping consumer responses differently, with posts featuring animals acting rationally often sparking curiosity due to the unexpected contrast with the typical perception of pets (Zhang et al., 2023). At the same time, they are also seen as valuable sources of information, making them particularly effective in influencing purchasing decisions (Zhang et al., 2023). Curiosity and perceived usefulness are also crucial, as posts that spark readers' interest and offer helpful information for making decisions have a greater impact (Zhang et al., 2023).

In short, digitalisation has facilitated access to pet products and services through e-commerce and new forms of veterinary consultation (Huang et al., 2021). UGC, including the opinions of other consumers and the influence of pet influencers, plays a crucial role in shaping pet owners' attitudes and purchase intentions, making authenticity and relevance of content key factors for brands in this market (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Myers et al., 2022; Shetty et al., 2024).

### 3. METHOD

As previously mentioned, the primary objective of this study is to explore the role of UGC on consumers' decision-making processes when conducting pet-related purchases, particularly aiming to answer the research question: “How does User-Generated Content influence consumers’ decision-making process regarding pet-related purchases?”.

The research is especially pertinent given the strong emotional bonds people frequently establish with their pets and the substantial influence it has on their shopping decisions (Chen et al., 2012). These relationships can occasionally override logical reasoning, resulting in superfluous purchases, often for products that lack scientific proof to benefit the pets (Chen et al., 2012; D’Souza et al., 2023).

To effectively address the research question, this study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research focuses on exploring and interpreting the complexities of social phenomena, emphasising context, perspectives, meaning, and subjectivity. It seeks to understand the “what”, “why”, “when”, “where”, “who”, or “how” (5W1H) of social behaviours and interactions, offering nuanced insights into human experiences (Lim, 2024).

For the purpose of this study, the primary method of data gathering consisted of semi-structured interviews (see full transcription: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10l0DAEYj8x2vVfhe2HQjvLP-CWPZZhDf?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10l0DAEYj8x2vVfhe2HQjvLP-CWPZZhDf?usp=share_link)). These interviews provide participants with the freedom to fully convey their thoughts and experiences while simultaneously allowing for the investigation of crucial themes (Lim, 2024), thereby aligning with the study's goal of exploring the complex dynamics of how UGC influences pet-related purchasing decisions.

Additionally, they allowed the researcher to focus on specific UGC-related themes while remaining open to any unexpected insights that may arise during conversation (Lim, 2024). This balance between structure and flexibility was essential for capturing the interaction between emotional and logical decision-making processes, especially in a context as emotionally charged as pet ownership.

Participants in this study were pet owners who served as the primary caregivers for their pets. This criterion was essential, as these individuals were expected to exhibit both emotional attachment and decision-making authority in pet-related purchases. The participation group included twenty Portuguese men and women of various ages (see Appendix 1). However, as the researcher was based in Portugal, only Portuguese citizens were interviewed. Participants were recruited through a combination of methods, including the researcher's personal acquaintances, frequent customers at a local pet store, and referrals from initial interviewees who recommended friends they considered suitable for the study.

Due to the personal nature of the discussions, ethical considerations took precedence. All participants were asked for informed consent, guaranteeing that they were aware of the study's objectives and the intended use of the gathered data. Confidentiality was upheld, and participants had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.

The interview questions were prepared in advance, although follow-up questions were posed to participants who raised relevant topics not originally included in the interview guide, which was structured around the themes identified in the literature review, such as the Pet–Human Relationship, the Purchase Decision-Making Process, the Intersection of the Pet–Human Relationship and Purchasing Decisions, and the Role of Digitalisation and User-Generated Content (see Table 1). Prior to conducting the main interviews, a pilot test was carried out to assess the clarity and relevance of the questions within the study's context, and based on the results, several questions were revised or removed.

The interviews, which averaged 40 minutes in length, were recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Word's Dictate tool. As they were conducted in Portuguese, the transcripts were later translated verbatim into English by the researcher. Following transcription and translation, key insights from each participant's responses were organised into thematic tables, one for each main topic addressed during the interviews (see Appendices 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6). This method facilitated a clearer interpretation and comparison of the participants' perspectives.

Thematic analysis, which is used to identify and interpret patterns or themes in a collection of qualitative data, was employed to analyse the information supplied by the interviews (Naeem et al., 2023). The thematic analysis is particularly useful for analysing dense, descriptive data, as it follows a structured and sequential approach to interpreting research data (Naeem et al., 2023). This improves the consistency and replicability of results and often leads to new perceptions and understandings, thereby being very popular among researchers (Naeem et al., 2023).

Key insights were drawn directly from participants’ original words, and with a total of twenty interviews completed, the process successfully reached data saturation and provided comprehension of the predefined topics.

**Table 1 – Interview Guide**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What’s your name and how old are you?</li> <li>2. What type of pet do you own?</li> <li>3. When did you adopt your pet?</li> </ol>
<b>Pet-Human Relationship</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Aside from you, as your pet's primary caregiver, is there anyone else who influences or makes purchasing decisions for your pet? If so, what motivates them to do so?</li> <li>5. How do you perceive your pet?</li> <li>6. Can you describe your relationship with your pet?</li> <li>7. How does your pet influence your daily life and emotional well-being?</li> <li>8. How do you feel when interacting with your pet?</li> <li>9. What activities do you usually do with your pet?</li> <li>10. Do you think your pet influences your social life? If so, how?</li> </ol>
<b>Purchase decision-making process</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Where do you usually buy pet-related products?</li> <li>12. What’s your typical buying process for pet-related products?</li> <li>13. What are the typical products you buy for your pet?</li> </ol>

	<p>14. Can you describe a distinctive purchase you made specifically because of your pet? What motivated that decision?</p> <p>15. For you, what triggers the need to buy a pet product?</p> <p>16. How often do you research before purchasing a pet-related product?</p> <p>17. What sources do you typically consult for information related to pets?</p> <p>18. Why do you trust the sources you consult?</p> <p>19. What factors do you consider most when buying pet products?</p> <p>20. Do you usually repurchase products that have worked for your pet?</p> <p>21. Is there any brand to which you are loyal? Why?</p> <p>22. How often do you buy brands that you haven't tried before?</p>
<p><b>Pet-human relationship and the purchase decision</b></p>	<p>23. How would you say your relationship with your pet influences your purchasing decisions?</p> <p>24. Would you say your pet's needs influence your lifestyle choices?</p> <p>25. Have you ever purchased a product or service because of recommendations from other pet owners?</p> <p>26. How do you feel about premium or luxury pet products?</p> <p>27. Do you think you spend more than necessary on your pet?</p> <p>28. Have you ever made an impulse purchase for your pet? What motivated that decision?</p> <p>29. Have you ever bought a product that you now perceive as superfluous? What influenced you to buy that product?</p>
<p><b>Digitalisation and User-Generated Content</b></p>	<p>30. Do you use social media platforms? Which ones do you use the most?</p>

	<p>31. Do you interact with pet-related content on social media platforms? Does it appear to you frequently?</p> <p>32. Do you follow any pet influencers or social media accounts related to pets or pet products? What draws you to them?</p> <p>33. Have you ever purchased a product/service because of UGC? If so, does that happen frequently?</p> <p>34. Have you ever bought a product/service promoted by a pet influencer? If so, does that happen frequently?</p> <p>35. Have you ever purchased a product/service because of brand advertisement? If so, does that happen frequently?</p> <p>36. What type of UGC do you enjoy the most when referring to pet-related products/services? Why?</p> <p>37. What type of UGC do you trust the most when referring to pet-related products/services? Why?</p> <p>38. Compare your trust in UGC and brand advertising for pet-related products.</p> <p>39. What would make UGC more useful or trustworthy for you when deciding on pet-related purchases?</p> <p>40. Overall, how would you say UGC impacts your purchase decisions?</p> <p>41. Have you ever posted a review of a pet product or shared your opinion about it online? If so, how often do you do this?</p>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>	<p>Is there anything else you would like to share about how your pet influences your shopping behaviour?</p>

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Pet-Human Relationship

While all participants identified themselves as the primary caregivers for their pets, for some, decision-making around pet-related purchases is not a solitary activity. A recurring theme among participants is the involvement of other household members, such as spouses, parents, and children, in pet-related decisions. In these contexts, cohabitation naturally fosters a shared sense of responsibility, with some family members stepping in due to proximity to pet stores or simply because they are engaged in the pet's day-to-day care. However, this was not the case for all, as some participants described themselves as the sole decision-makers, either due to stronger emotional attachment, or practical reasons, such as a pet's pickiness with food or behaviour that required consistency.

In several accounts, emotional bonds with the pet extended beyond the primary caregiver, with other family members also demonstrating strong attachments. Some became emotionally invested through daily companionship and care, and others had played key roles in the initial decision to adopt the pet.

Across participants, the perception of pets consistently transcends traditional notions of ownership. A dominant narrative emerged around pets being seen as integral family members, and participants frequently described their pets using familial language, such as “like a daughter”, “like a son”, or “like a niece”. Tatiana, for instance, spoke of her household as including both human and feline family members, emphasising the depth of emotional inclusion.

In some cases, the relationship with the pets was also described as being similar to that of a best friend, confidant, and constant companion. These metaphors suggest that pets fulfil deeply emotional and relational roles in participants' lives. Only two participants, Helena and Pedro, framed their pets more traditionally, referring to them as companions rather than family members, yet they still acknowledged a strong emotional bond.

The quality of the human-animal bond was consistently described with warmth, intimacy, and reciprocity. Participants spoke of affectionate relationships characterised by

frequent interaction and mutual recognition, with examples including pets following their guardians around the home, eagerly welcoming them upon arrival, or seeking out physical closeness through cuddles and lap time. Several participants reflected on how their pets seemed to perceive and respond to their emotional states, offering companionship during stressful or depressing moments.

In households with multiple pets, participants noted different relationships with each animal, which suggests that pets are seen as individuals with distinct personalities and relational dynamics. The age of the pet also shaped the nature of interactions, with younger pets being described as more active and older pets reported to engage in calmer forms of companionship.

Pets were widely described as having a profound and ongoing influence on participants' emotional landscapes and daily routines, with duties such as feeding, grooming, administering medication, and playing being frequently mentioned, serving not just as acts of care but as moments of connection. For some, this sense of structure was not seen as burdensome, but rather as a meaningful part of their everyday life.

On an emotional level, pets were often credited with bringing joy, calmness, and emotional support, with several participants emphasising the comfort of knowing their pet was “always there”, especially during difficult times or moments of stress. However, some participants, like Amanda and Tatiana, acknowledged occasional stress, particularly when pets were unwell or exhibited problematic behaviour.

Interacting with pets was described as a reliably uplifting experience, with participants speaking of feeling “happy”, “calm”, “fulfilled”, and “great” during these moments. Whether through play, physical affection, or simply being in the same space, these moments were described as positive and emotionally enriching. The presence of the pet itself often provided comfort, with some participants mentioning that even passive companionship (e.g., sitting nearby) had a soothing effect.

Participants described a wide range of activities they do with their pets, many of which are tailored to the species, interests, and life stage of the animal. For both cats and dogs, common activities included feeding, grooming, playing, and cuddling. Dog owners

frequently mentioned outdoor activities such as walks, visits to parks or beaches, and more physically interactive play like fetch. Additionally, some dog owners use professional grooming services, and others integrate their pets into their fitness routines. Cat guardians, on the other hand, described more home-based interactions, including indoor play, lap time, and supervised outdoor time.

The social influence of pets emerged as a multifaceted theme. For dog guardians in particular, pets often acted as social bridges, facilitating interactions with strangers and acquaintances in public spaces such as parks or during walks. These encounters occasionally led to meaningful connections, including friendships and networking opportunities, as was the case with João. Even outside of direct interaction, pets were often topics of conversation within existing social circles. Participants reported sharing stories, photos, and experiences with friends and family, integrating their pets into their broader social narrative, and Fernanda even mentioned that adopting her pet has improved communication between her and her husband, as it encourages them to talk.

On a more practical level, pets influence social behaviour by shaping availability and preferences, with some participants describing modifying travel plans, declining invitations, or choosing pet-friendly venues due to their pet's needs. Additionally, some participants noted positive lifestyle influences, as pets were seen as sources of companionship and motivation to maintain active routines, helping to reduce feelings of isolation.

## **4.2. Purchase Decision-Making Process**

Participants reported purchasing pet products from a variety of sources, including local or specialised pet stores, supermarkets, and online platforms. Some choose online shopping for cost savings or greater variety, while others prefer physical stores for convenience or personal interaction with staff. Additional points of purchase included pharmacies, veterinary clinics, or even home delivery, arranged by pet hotel owners or kibble brands, as is the case with Carolina and Paulo. The choice of retailer often depends on the

type of product, with dry food, for example, being frequently purchased online or in pet shops, whereas treats and wet food are more commonly picked up at supermarkets.

The purchasing process tends to differ across individuals. For essential items such as kibble or litter, purchases are commonly triggered when stock runs low or when promotions are available. On the other hand, purchases of non-essential items, such as toys, are often more spontaneous and guided by visual appeal or novelty.

The most frequently mentioned items bought for pets include dry food (kibble), treats, and wet food. Toys are also commonly purchased, though some participants noted their pets quickly lose interest or prefer simpler objects. For cat owners, litter is a recurring purchase. Additional products mentioned include grooming brushes, hygiene items, pet colognes, leashes, collars, beds, salmon oil, and deworming tablets. Clothing and accessories are also bought by some, though less commonly.

Distinctive purchases are frequently driven by a desire to enhance the pet's comfort or well-being. Examples included padded beds for dogs, stainless steel food and water bowls. As well as elevated bowls to aid digestion, joint supplements for older pets, dental care products recommended by a store employee for pets with bad breath, buffalo bones, cow hooves, activity mats for entertainment and mental stimulation, birthday cakes, and a carrier used to rescue a stray cat. Motivations for buying these products often stem from a sense of responsibility and care, the intention to provide variety or novelty, or simply to make the pet happy. Additionally, some purchases were inspired by aesthetic appeal or the perceived cuteness or fun factor of the product.

The most common triggers for purchasing pet-related products include the need to replace essential items such as food or litter, and the desire to pamper the pet or offer something special. Visual stimuli, such as discovering something interesting in-store or online, also play a role. Other triggers involve health concerns (e.g., dental treats or specific food types), seasonal needs (such as blankets in winter), or emotional motivations like wanting to provide better care than in previous pet ownership experiences.

Research habits vary significantly, with the majority of participants rarely conducting research when it comes to routine purchases or trusted products. Some people

investigate more thoroughly when it comes to health-related items or food, and frequent research is more common among those purchasing supplements, trying new products, or shopping online. Some owners limit research to price comparisons, and for non-essential items like toys, research tends to be more superficial or spontaneous.

The most commonly cited sources for research include veterinarians, pet store staff, and peers such as friends or other pet owners. Online resources are also frequently used, including Google, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, veterinary websites/blogs, and price comparison platforms like Kuanto Kusta. Some participants mentioned consulting pharmacists or pet nutritionists, as was the case with Nilza and Sérgio, especially for health or dietary concerns, and Rita and Rodrigo even referenced AI tools like Grok or ChatGPT. An animal welfare association, “Gatos Urbanos”, was also mentioned as a trusted source by Tatiana.

Trust in information sources is often linked to perceived professional expertise, such as that of veterinarians, pet store staff, or pharmacists, and long-standing relationships, especially with veterinarians who have followed the pet over time. In the case of friends, trust arises from shared experiences and familiarity. For online sources, trust is built through cross-checking information, reading user reviews, watching product demonstrations, and assessing the authenticity of the content. Price comparison websites are valued for providing objective data. Trust in pet store staff is also grounded in the belief that they are properly trained.

Participants prioritise quality and price, often aiming for the best value. Safety and durability are especially important for toys and accessories, while for food, nutritional content and ingredients are key concerns. The expected benefit of the product for the pet is a central factor. Nilza states that hygiene plays an important role in the purchase of items such as litter, and some, like Paulo, Raquel, João, Ana, and Sérgio, state that brand reputation and product appearance also influence purchasing decisions.

Most participants reported that they repurchase products that have proven effective or suitable for their pets, with this tendency being particularly strong for essential items such

as food. Still, a few participants mentioned that their pets can be picky, occasionally requiring changes in products.

Furthermore, many participants expressed brand loyalty, particularly regarding dry food. Loyalty is often attributed to the pet's acceptance of the product, absence of adverse health effects, appropriate nutritional content, and successful recommendations. Some participants are also loyal to specific wet food brands, for example, Rita and Tatiana. In contrast, loyalty is less common for toys and accessories. Changes in brand are sometimes made due to evolving health needs or to prevent the pet from becoming bored.

Moreover, some rarely try new brands unless recommended by a vet or store staff, while others do so occasionally, especially with treats or free samples. Many reported being more likely to experiment with new toys or non-essential items. Frequent experimentation usually occurs when pets have specific dietary needs or are particularly selective.

#### **4.3. Pet-human Relationship and the Purchase Decision**

Most participants shared that their emotional bond with their pet plays a central role in shaping their purchasing behaviours. As gathered at the beginning of the interviews, pets are often perceived not merely as animals but as friends, companions, or family members, and this relational view generates a sense of care, responsibility, and emotional investment that guides choices around products and services. A recurring theme was the desire to cater to the pet's preferences and comfort. Carlos, for example, framed the act of buying food his dog enjoys as a form of respect, and Inês expressed joy in seeing her pets happy and healthy. Several participants emphasised the importance of choosing products that enhance the pet's quality of life. For instance, Ana, a veterinarian, selects healthier options for his overweight animals, taking their specific needs into account. Fernanda spoke of wanting "the best" for her cat, while Gabriela described feeling responsible for ensuring her pet experiences variety and mental stimulation. Some purchases are motivated by the pleasure the owner derives from the pet's response. Raquel, for example, purchases non-essential items because her dog's excitement brings her joy.

Interestingly, while most respondents described the relationship as a key influence, some participants highlighted that responsibility alone would prompt them to provide what their pets need, regardless of emotional closeness. Carolina noted that she would continue to meet her dog's needs out of duty, even if the bond were not strong, and Amanda expressed a similar sentiment.

The influence of pets extends beyond purchasing and into daily routines and broader lifestyle decisions. Most participants described noticeable shifts in their habits and planning as a result of caring for their animals. Adjustments to daily routines were among the most commonly mentioned changes, as the majority of participants described allocating time each day for their pets' care. João, for instance, shared that his daily schedule is often shaped around walking his dog.

Travel and social plans were also mentioned, with participants describing the need to arrange pet care in advance or even alter their destinations to accommodate their pets, illustrating how the pet's well-being becomes a central factor even in decisions not directly related to pet care. Sérgio, for instance, opted for vacation accommodations based on pet-friendliness, and Rita chose to bring her cats abroad to avoid the stress of leaving them behind. Moreover, certain participants reported adapting their routines to cater to older pets or those with medical needs, for instance, by preparing special meals or administering medication. Living arrangements are another area shaped by pet ownership, as Pedro shared that he intends to live in a pet-permitting house, further showcasing the impact pets have on owners' lives.

Most participants acknowledged that recommendations from other pet owners influence their purchasing decisions, and that these suggestions typically come from friends, family, or acquaintances who also have pets and are perceived as knowledgeable or trustworthy. Products purchased as a result of peer recommendations included kibble, treats, toys (e.g., Kong), specific wet foods, malt paste, litter, grooming tools, and brushes. While many valued this informal exchange of knowledge, some participants reported being more selective. Gabriela, for instance, expressed that she only takes recommendations seriously if she trusts the recommender's standard of pet care. Although peer influence was generally

considered helpful, a few respondents said they rarely act on such advice, and some had never done so, for instance, Amanda, Ana, Fernanda and Inês.

A strong preference for premium or higher-quality products emerged across interviews, particularly when such products were believed to contribute to the pet's health and comfort. For many, the perceived value of the product, especially in terms of well-being, was the main justification for higher spending. Some participants mentioned choosing specialised foods for ill pets or opting for higher-quality options as a preventative measure. Sérgio, for instance, believed that investing in better food could reduce long-term veterinary costs. While quality was widely prioritised, respondents also expressed a critical awareness of price. Some felt that high quality is not always synonymous with higher prices and mentioned satisfactory experiences with mid-range brands. Paulo noted that premium products do not always deliver significantly more value than more affordable alternatives, and Inês mentioned that sometimes, the most expensive kibble didn't appeal to her pets.

Respondents varied in how they evaluated their own spending habits on pet-related items. Several considered their spending appropriate, citing health, nutrition, and general well-being as justifications. These participants often emphasised buying only what was necessary or ensuring value without defaulting to either the cheapest or most expensive options. Others acknowledged that they may sometimes spend more than strictly necessary. In these cases, motivations ranged from wanting the "best" available product, to buying non-essential items like toys or accessories, to emotionally driven decisions such as wanting to spoil the pet or treat them "like family". Medical expenses also figured into perceptions of high spending, particularly in response to illness or ageing. Nonetheless, for many, this additional spending was framed not as excessive but as an investment in the pet's quality of life.

Impulse buying was a common behaviour among participants, and most described instances where they purchased items spontaneously, often triggered by visual appeal, curiosity, or emotional connection. Toys were the most frequently mentioned impulse purchases, with respondents citing seeing a toy that looked fun, cute, or amusing as sufficient motivation. Raquel, for instance, bought pet clothing because it was "too cute to resist", and Ana recalled purchasing a festive hat purely for the sake of aesthetics and a photo

opportunity. Other spontaneous purchases included treats, new food items, beds, blankets, grooming tools, and a water fountain. In some cases, impulse purchases were linked to a recommendation or stemmed from a desire to improve the pet's comfort or care. That said, a minority of participants reported avoiding impulsive purchases. Paulo and Amanda, for example, described themselves as deliberate and thoughtful shoppers, even when it comes to their pets.

Several participants recounted having bought products that they later deemed unnecessary or not well-suited to their pet. Toys were once again the most commonly cited items in this category. These purchases were often based on the assumption that the pet would enjoy them, however, many pets showed disinterest or preferred simpler alternatives. As Rita noted, her older cats tend to favour cardboard boxes over expensive toys, an experience shared by Fernanda and Tatiana.

Other examples of superfluous purchases included treats that were rejected, leashes that went unused, an overly costly scratching post, and clothing or accessories that the animal disliked. Impulse, recommendations, and the owner's emotional desire to offer something nice were common drivers behind these less successful purchases. On the other hand, some participants reported rarely or never buying products they considered unnecessary, stating that all purchases were made with the pet's well-being in mind, even if the pet didn't always fully engage with the item.

#### **4.4. Digitalisation and User-Generated Content**

Among participants, the use of social media platforms is widely present in their daily lives. Instagram was mentioned as the most used platform, followed closely by Facebook and TikTok, especially for video consumption. WhatsApp also appeared as a common communication tool. One participant, Carlos, reported not using social media at all. In general, usage tends to be more passive, focused on content consumption rather than active posting.

The vast majority of participants who use social media reported interacting with pet-related content, which appears frequently on their feeds. Some mentioned that the

frequency of such content seems to increase after liking or commenting on similar posts, while Amanda suggested that even talking about pets near her phone might influence what appears. Only Paulo stated that he does not interact much with this type of content.

Many participants also follow pet-related accounts, ranging from brands and pet stores to shelters, rescue organisations, and animal welfare groups. Engagement with these profiles is often linked to interest in adoption, compassion for animal causes, or a search for information and practical tips. Entertainment is another driver, with funny or heartwarming videos being commonly appreciated. Although not all participants used the term “influencer”, some do follow famous pet profiles or creators whose pets regularly appear in their content, among them Mariana, Rodrigo, and Amanda. Others, while consuming this type of content, do not follow specific accounts.

Experiences with UGC vary widely. Some participants reported purchasing products after seeing them recommended on social media, such as toys, food, or accessories. This influence tends to happen occasionally, usually when the content seems authentic or helpful. However, the majority said they are rarely influenced by user recommendations or do not feel affected by suggestions from strangers.

Additionally, most participants stated they had not purchased a product or service directly due to a promotion by a pet influencer. However, some acknowledged being indirectly inspired by such content, such as seeing a product in a video or getting ideas for pet care or accessories, as was the case with Raquel and Rodrigo. When there is influence, it tends to be tied to the natural feel of the content, the way the product is presented, and the perceived sincerity of the influencer. Nonetheless, distrust remains common, especially when there are signs of commercial intent, but even in the absence of explicit brand collaborations, many participants still express scepticism toward influencers.

Brand advertising was generally not seen as a major driver of purchases. Still, some participants shared having bought products after seeing them advertised on social media or shopping on websites, particularly when promotions were involved. In some cases, ads may spark curiosity, but the final decision depends on other factors, such as reviews, perceived need, or price.

Videos were the most commonly mentioned and appreciated type of UGC, especially those that are funny or heartwarming. Beyond emotional appeal, many valued informative content such as training tips, veterinary advice, or rescue stories.

Trust in UGC varies among participants. Videos tend to be perceived as more trustworthy because they allow viewers to see the product in use. The credibility of the content creator is also crucial. For instance, veterinarians, known individuals, or creators with a reputation for honesty are more trusted. Additionally, comments and reviews from other users are considered helpful by some.

Many participants expressed greater trust in UGC compared to traditional advertising, viewing it as based on real experiences and not directly driven by sales goals. However, this trust is selective and depends on the source and context. In contrast, some participants said they trust brands more, associating them with professionals and regulation. Others reported not fully trusting either UGC or brand advertising, while some combine both sources, using different opinions to form their decision.

Participants pointed out several factors that would make UGC more trustworthy or useful, such as effective demonstrations of the product, often through detailed videos showing use, features, and pet interaction, and clear, detailed information, including nutritional analysis for food, scientific backing, or price-to-quality explanations. The credibility of the content creator appears, once again, as an important factor. Having professional knowledge (e.g., veterinarians), being personally known, having a reputation for honest reviews, or appearing genuine and knowledgeable also influence how people perceive the content. Showing that pets are happy and benefiting from the product, and making fair comparisons between different brands, are also mentioned among strategies that can work.

Nevertheless, some participants remain sceptical or are not easily influenced, regardless of how the content is presented. Carolina, for instance, mentioned still preferring to see the product in person after doing online research.

The overall influence of UGC on purchasing decisions is mixed. Several participants stated it has little or no effect. For these individuals, decisions are primarily

based on their own knowledge, past experiences, or trusted offline sources like friends or store clerks. Others acknowledged a partial or moderate influence, especially when the content includes reviews or helpful presentations. Some find it useful in discovering new products. For others, the influence depends on the trustworthiness of the person sharing, the informational value of the content, or the involvement of credible groups like welfare organisations. The majority of participants reported that UGC influence is not strong, with social media acting primarily as a space for entertainment.

Furthermore, most participants do not usually post reviews or opinions about pet products online. Among those who have, the motivation was often to support a friend's small business, share a positive experience, or help others. Even so, these actions are rare and not part of their routine. When opinions are shared, it tends to happen in informal settings or through conversations with friends rather than publicly on social platforms.

## 5. DISCUSSION

By comparing the findings with existing literature, this chapter analyses the major themes that surfaced from the interviews. The goal is to explore areas of convergence and divergence between theoretical frameworks and the lived experiences of participants, thereby enriching our understanding of pet ownership and pet-related consumer behaviour.

### 5.1. Pet-Human Relationship

A key point of convergence between the literature and the findings is the conceptualisation of pets as family members, as explored by Applebaum et al. (2021) and McConnell et al. (2019). The findings highlight participants' frequent use of familial language to describe their pets, reflecting an emotional integration of animals into the household unit. Similarly, Boya et al. (2012) affirm this notion, emphasising that owning cats and dogs transcends material possessions. This shared theme underscores the depth of emotional investment and attachment owners feel towards their pets.

The emotional dimension of pet ownership is further reinforced through both the literature and the findings discussion of emotional bonds and support. Empirical studies have linked pet interaction to a range of psychological benefits, including reduced stress, enhanced emotional regulation, and overall mental well-being, as stated by Martins et al. (2023) and Morgan et al. (2020). Moreover, Applebaum et al. (2021) and Young et al. (2020) point specifically to the physiological effects of pet companionship, such as the calming of the nervous system through physical closeness or touch. These are corroborated by the findings, where participants described their pets as sensitive to human emotions and capable of providing comfort during times of distress. Such narratives extend beyond the role of pets as mere companions, suggesting that participants experience pets as responsive, emotionally attuned beings who actively contribute to their well-being.

Companionship emerges as another significant point of alignment. The findings reveal that many participants described their pets as best friends or confidants, regardless of whether they used familial terminology, and the literature supports this perception,

identifying companionship as a primary benefit of pet ownership, reinforcing the emotional role of pets in owners' lives, as cited by Applebaum et al. (2021), Boya et al. (2012), and Oosthuizen et al. (2023).

One more area of agreement is the influence of pets on daily routines and lifestyle structure. According to the findings, pet care activities such as feeding, grooming, and administering medication were described not only as responsibilities, but also as meaningful engagements. Adjustments to routines, particularly for ageing or ill pets, and changes in travel and social plans reflect the prioritisation of pets within participants' lives. While the literature does not delve into such specifics, it similarly affirms that pets contribute to a structured lifestyle, sometimes even facilitating participation in new activities, which may enhance psychological stability, as stated by Ellis et al. (2024a) and Oosthuizen et al. (2023).

Both the literature and the findings also acknowledge the role of pets in social facilitation. The literature situates pets within a broader social framework, noting that they foster social cohesion by promoting empathy, trust, and respect, as cited by Morgan et al. (2020) and can strengthen neighbourhood ties and social capital, particularly through the shared experiences of dog walking or pet-related community engagement, according to Applebaum et al. (2021) and Oosthuizen et al. (2023). The findings corroborate this idea by illustrating how dogs, in particular, serve as social bridges, facilitating spontaneous interactions in public and acting as conversational anchors within personal networks.

In terms of physical activity, both the literature and the findings showcase a positive correlation between dog ownership and increased physical movement. Martins et al. (2023) associate pet ownership, particularly of dogs, with improved physical health through regular exercise and playtime. Likewise, the findings illustrate owners incorporating pets into their outdoor routines, including walks and fitness activities.

Finally, both the literature and the findings underscore the importance of the quality of the human-animal bond. Ellis et al. (2024b) mention that the benefits of pet ownership are contingent upon the strength and positivity of this bond, and the findings reinforce this idea, with interviewees characterising the bond with their pets with terms such as intimacy, warmth, and reciprocity, highlighting mutual affection and recognition.

Together, the literature and the findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role pets play in human lives. They strongly support one another on central themes such as the familial framing of pets, the depth of emotional and psychological support they offer, their facilitation of social and physical engagement, and the significance of the human-animal bond.

## **5.2. Purchase Decision-Making Process**

Drawing on insights from the literature and the findings, this section uses the widely accepted consumer purchase decision process as a framework to understand the purchasing behaviours of pet owners for pet-related purchases.

According to Chaipradernsak (2007) and Kotler and Keller (2006), the purchase process begins with problem recognition, which occurs when an internal or external stimulus triggers awareness of a need. This may arise from internal factors (e.g. hunger, discomfort) or external ones (e.g. advertising, promotions, social influence). In the findings, it was possible to identify multiple triggers for pet product purchases, many of which align with this framework. These include the need to replace essential items (e.g. kibble, litter), responses to promotional offers or visual stimuli, health concerns, seasonal needs, and emotional motivations such as the desire to pamper one's pet. Internal stimuli are evident in responses to basic care needs, while external stimuli are reflected in marketing cues or novel product encounters. Emotional motivations, such as the owner's desire to improve the pet's comfort or happiness, also reflect a form of need recognition, albeit one rooted in affective or relational considerations. These findings illustrate how the problem recognition stage can encompass both utilitarian and emotional drivers in the context of pet ownership.

Once again, Chaipradernsak (2007) and Kotler and Keller (2006) note that, following need recognition, consumers may engage in an information search, which can vary in intensity. For routine or familiar purchases, this stage may be bypassed altogether. However, when a product is unfamiliar or perceived as high-risk, a more active search typically occurs. The findings reflect this variability in depth and frequency of information-seeking. Routine purchases, especially of trusted products, seem to often involve minimal to

no research. In contrast, decisions involving health-related items, supplements, or new brands typically trigger more extensive information gathering. Participants consulted a range of sources, including veterinarians, pharmacists, pet store staff, friends, online platforms (e.g. Google, social media, veterinary websites), and even AI tools. Trust in these sources was influenced by perceived expertise, past experience, relational trust, and digital validation mechanisms. This view aligns with the theoretical description, although the findings allow for the understanding of why consumers choose specific sources and tailor their information search to the perceived importance or risk of the purchase. Nonetheless, some interviewees report ignoring this phase of the decision process.

After the information phase comes the evaluation of alternatives, which involves comparing products based on attributes relevant to the consumer's preferences and needs. This process leads to the formation of an attitude or opinion that influences the final purchase decision, which is in line with Chaipradernsak's (2007) and Kotler and Keller's (2006) research. The findings showcase how participants evaluated various pet products, and key considerations included price, quality, safety (especially for toys and accessories), nutritional content (for food), perceived benefit, hygiene (for litter), brand reputation, and even product aesthetics or novelty. In some cases, purchases were driven by affective considerations, such as making the pet happy or providing comfort. These criteria directly exemplify the evaluation mechanisms described in the literature. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that evaluations are not only rational but often emotionally charged and pet-centred, reflecting both cognitive and affective dimensions in consumer decision-making.

According to Chaipradernsak (2007) and Kotler and Keller (2006), the purchase decision is the outcome of prior evaluation, although it can be influenced by external factors such as others' opinions or unexpected constraints. This stage also includes sub-decisions regarding the product type, brand, retailer, timing, quantity, and payment method. Additionally, it distinguishes between deliberate decisions and impulse purchases, particularly for low-involvement products, which further aligns with the information gathered. The findings illustrate how participants' decisions were shaped by both deliberation and spontaneity. Purchases were made across diverse platforms, including supermarkets, specialised pet stores, veterinary clinics, pharmacies, and online retailers,

depending on the nature of the product. For essential items, decisions were often planned and based on established preferences. However, for non-essential goods such as toys, participants frequently described spontaneous or emotionally driven purchases. The motivations behind these purchases included novelty, aesthetic appeal, the perceived enjoyment of the pet, and variety-seeking. These findings align, once again, with Chaipradernsak's (2007) and Comegys et al.'s (2006) work, demonstrating both structured decision-making and impulse buying behaviours within the same consumer group.

In the final stage of the model, Chaipradernsak (2007) and Kotler and Keller (2006) state that consumers evaluate their satisfaction with the product and their experience, which in turn influences brand loyalty, repurchase behaviour, and word-of-mouth recommendations. The findings support this framework by documenting strong patterns of brand loyalty, particularly for essential products such as dry food. However, brand loyalty was notably weaker for non-essentials like toys and accessories, which were more frequently subject to change or experimentation. Participants noted factors that prompted brand switching, such as changes in pet health or a desire to prevent boredom. The findings not only validate the general post-purchase evaluation process but also enrich it by illustrating situational nuances and the influence of pet preferences on consumer loyalty. These insights highlight how satisfaction and loyalty in pet-related purchases are co-constructed by both owner and animal responses.

The comparison between the literature and the findings demonstrates a strong alignment between observed consumer behaviours and the theoretical stages of the consumer purchase decision process, which suggests that the five-stage model remains highly relevant in understanding pet-related purchasing decisions, especially those involving deliberation and emotional investment. Moreover, the findings extend the model by offering context-specific insights, such as the emotional drivers of problem recognition, the interpersonal and digital dimensions of information search, and the dynamic role of pets in shaping post-purchase satisfaction, highlighting the complexity of decision-making in the pet product domain.

### 5.3. Pet-human Relationship and the Purchase Decision

In accordance with Boya et al. (2012), D'Souza et al. (2023) and Liu et al. (2024), pets are often perceived as family members, companions, or even extensions of the owner's identity, reflecting deep emotional bonds similar to human attachment. It also notes that pets may serve self-reflective purposes, helping owners shape and express aspects of their identity, which in turn influences their purchasing behaviour. Participant testimonies support this notion, as this perception is shown to cultivate a sense of responsibility and emotional investment.

Apaolaza et al. (2022) and Chen et al. (2012) indicate that stronger emotional connections correlate with greater willingness to invest in a pet's well-being, often through the purchase of non-essential or luxury goods. Likewise, the findings show that participants expressed a desire to provide comfort and enjoyment to their pets, justifying additional spending as an investment in quality of life rather than indulgence. In some cases, owners described purchasing decisions as being guided as much by their own emotional gratification as by their pets' needs.

Apaolaza et al. (2022), Boya et al. (2012), Chen et al. (2012), and D'Souza et al. (2023) suggest that the tendency for anthropomorphism helps explain purchases of symbolic or fashionable items such as pet clothing or gifts, often driven by a perception of pets as children. This theme is evident in findings, as several participants reported buying clothes or novelty items simply because they found them aesthetically pleasing or emotionally meaningful, such as describing items as "too cute to resist". Furthermore, according to Chen et al. (2012), emotional attachment and anthropomorphic thinking frequently drive the purchase of services and products beyond basic care, including toys, grooming services, and high-end accessories. Testimonials, once more, confirm these patterns, with participants mentioning impulse purchases and gift-like acquisitions meant to spoil or surprise their pets. These behaviours reflect a stronger emotional logic and align closely with the literature observations.

While emotional drivers are central, rational considerations also play a critical role. Chaipradernsak (2007) and Chen et al. (2012) discuss how price and quality remain key factors in decision-making, with emotional attachment influencing how value is perceived.

This is echoed in the findings, where participants showed a strong preference for premium or higher-quality items, particularly in relation to health and comfort. Notably, some participants were critically aware that a higher price does not always equate to higher quality, reporting positive experiences with mid-range brands.

Liu et al. (2024) theorise that pet ownership, associated with higher subjective well-being, can lead to increased impulsive purchases, especially of hedonic products. This is further reinforced by the findings, as participants frequently described making spontaneous purchases, often triggered by emotional responses, such as wanting to spoil their pet, the desire to see the pet well and happy, or the pleasure they derive from the pet's positive response or excitement.

Regarding peer recommendations, most participants reported relying on suggestions from other pet owners, particularly friends and family who are pet owners, when selecting products, which is in line with Liu et al.'s (2024), and Sun et al.'s (2022) research. This peer influence, based on trust and shared experience, appears to play a significant role in shaping purchasing outcomes, although participants varied in how heavily they relied on these recommendations.

Both the literature and the findings acknowledge the interplay between rational and emotional factors. Apaolaza et al. (2022), Chen et al. (2012), and Kwak and Cha (2021) assert that price and quality considerations coexist with strong emotional motivators rooted in the pet-human bond, and the findings provide evidence of this dual influence. Participants often cited health and effectiveness (rational) as reasons for product selection, while also describing decisions based on emotional motivations such as enjoyment, affection, and impulse. Interestingly, the testimonials introduced a sense of *duty* as a driver, where owners acted out of responsibility even in the absence of a deep emotional connection, a nuance not explored in the literature.

Despite this study not being focused on post-purchase regret, the findings add depth by reporting that some participants reflected critically on past purchases, especially toys, which were later deemed unnecessary or unsuited to their pet. These insights suggest that while emotional and social drivers play a powerful role, owners may retrospectively evaluate

these decisions through a more rational lens. This is in accordance with Sokić et al. (2020) research, which highlights that post-purchase consumer regret is a complex, distressing emotion that consumers can experience after making a purchase, encompassing both emotional and rational elements, such as self-blame and the contemplation of alternative outcomes, which can influence future decisions for a product and potentially reduce satisfaction levels.

The interviews also extend beyond purchasing behaviour to highlight how pet ownership influences daily routines, social interactions, and even travel or housing decisions, offering a broader lifestyle context that helps explain the depth of emotional investment that underpins pet-related consumer behaviour.

#### **5.4. Digitalisation and User-Generated Content**

The literature highlights the transformative impact of digitalisation on retail, including the pet market, pointing to a sharp increase in e-commerce sales. Consumers are not only purchasing pet food and medication online but are also increasingly accessing services like online veterinary consultations and AI-assisted care, as demonstrated by Huang et al. (2021), Rombach and Dean (2021), and Widmar et al. (2020). Although interview participants did not explicitly discuss these broader developments, their behaviours imply engagement with digitalisation. Most notably, some participants mentioned purchasing products encountered via social media platforms, while others described using online platforms for research, indicating both familiarity and confidence in digital environments.

Participants reported widespread use of social media platforms, primarily Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, for consuming rather than producing content. Pet-related content was described as frequent and engaging, with some participants noting that interaction with such content seemed to increase its visibility in their feeds. Several participants also followed brands, pet influencers, or creators featuring their pets. This aligns closely with Zhang et al.'s (2023) research, indicating a growing intersection between pet ownership and digital content consumption, particularly the popularity of pet influencers and user-curated pet profiles. Both the literature, namely Jannat et al. (2025), Myers et al. (2022)

and Shetty et al. (2024), and the findings confirm the prominence of pet-related content in the digital environment and reinforce the notion that pet owners are active participants in the digital ecosystem, even if primarily as consumers rather than contributors.

Geng and Chen (2021) and Shetty et al. (2024) define UGC as media created and shared by users, such as reviews, photos, testimonials, and social media posts, and interview participants' responses reflect interactions with these same types of content, particularly product recommendations on social media, video demonstrations, and user reviews or comments. This alignment suggests that participants are familiar with UGC and actively engage with it across various platforms.

Bahtar and Muda (2016), Jannat et al. (2025) and Shetty et al. (2024) position UGC as a powerful influence on consumer behaviour, functioning as social proof and shaping decision-making, particularly through pet influencers. However, participant responses reveal a more complex and varied relationship. Some individuals had purchased products after encountering them in UGC, particularly when content appeared authentic and useful. Yet, the majority reported only occasional or insignificant influence from UGC, preferring to rely on their own experiences or trusted offline sources. This contrast underscores the important nuance that while UGC may be broadly influential, its impact is not uniformly experienced, as for many participants in this study, the role of UGC in shaping purchasing decisions was limited or indirect. The findings further suggest that the influence of UGC could be affected by individual trust, content authenticity, and context.

As for pet influencers, Myers et al. (2022) and Zhang et al. (2023) position them as a particularly powerful form of UGC, with considerable sway over consumer decisions. Interview data painted a more measured picture. While some participants did follow well-known pet accounts or creators (e.g., Mariana, Rodrigo, Amanda), few reported making purchases directly due to influencer content. Influence, when present, was often indirect or inspirational rather than directly persuasive. This, once again, suggests a gap between the literature's emphasis on the strategic power of influencers and the everyday experience of consumers. For many participants, pet influencers were a source of entertainment or aesthetic inspiration rather than a primary driver of purchasing behaviour.

Bahtar and Muda (2016), Jannat et al. (2025) and Shetty et al. (2024) suggests a declining effectiveness of traditional brand advertising compared to UGC, which is viewed as more authentic. Participant responses reflected mixed attitudes, and while some expressed greater trust in UGC due to its perceived honesty, others continued to trust brands for their professionalism, quality control, and regulatory compliance. A few participants reported distrusting both sources and prefer to triangulate multiple inputs before making decisions. This indicates that while UGC may be increasingly relevant, traditional brand influence persists, particularly when paired with promotional offers or high perceived quality. The interview data suggest a more balanced consumer landscape than implied by the literature's narrative of UGC dominance.

Jannat et al. (2025) and Shetty et al. (2024) additionally acknowledge that brands may encourage UGC through campaigns or contests. However, interview participants reported only limited engagement in content creation. Most identify themselves as passive consumers, occasionally posting about products to support small businesses, share positive experiences, help others, or simply to showcase their pets, with these instances being described as infrequent, informal, and typically lacking a deliberate intent to promote a product. This contrast showcases a gap between the literature's emphasis on UGC generation and the actual behaviour of average users. While UGC remains influential, its creation appears to be driven by a smaller, more actively engaged subset of users. The majority of participants in this study acted primarily as observers rather than contributors, and even those who did share content tended to do so sporadically and with a focus on their pets, rather than the products themselves.

These findings suggest that while the broader trends outlined in the literature are valid, the real-world behaviours of consumers, especially within this study's sample, are more selective, critical, and context-dependent than broad claims may suggest.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the complex relationship between UGC and consumer behaviour regarding pet-related purchases, particularly considering the profound influence of the pet-human relationship. The research aimed to answer the question: “How does User-Generated Content influence consumers’ decision-making process regarding pet-related purchases?”.

In direct response to the research question, the study's findings reveal that while UGC is present and viewed as potentially valuable, its overall influence on participants' purchasing decisions is often limited or indirect. Many participants primarily rely on their own past experiences, direct knowledge of their pet's needs and preferences, or trusted offline sources such as veterinarians, pet store staff, or friends and family who are pet owners. Pet influencers, while popular for entertainment, rarely seem to trigger direct purchases, serving more as sources of indirect inspiration or ideas. The strong emotional bond and the desire to provide the best for their specific pet make owners critically evaluate external information, such as UGC, by assessing whether the content aligns with their pet's individual needs, health, and preferences before being significantly swayed.

In essence, UGC acts as a potential information source and inspiration generator in the pet-related purchase decision process. It can introduce new products, provide comparative data (especially price comparisons), and offer insights into real-world product use. However, its actual influence on the final purchase decision is mediated by the owner's established knowledge, trust in the specific source of the content, the perceived authenticity and utility of the information, and, critically, the specific needs and preferences of their individual pet, which are central to the deeply emotional pet-human relationship. The study thus suggests that while social media provides a visible platform for UGC in the pet market, its impact is not a simple, direct path to purchase, but rather a nuanced interaction with existing knowledge, trusted relationships, and the paramount consideration of the pet's well-being within the family unit.

In terms of theoretical implications, a key advancement of this research is the identification of a "sense of duty" as a potential driver for pet-related purchases among

participants. While the literature emphasises the significant influence of the emotional bond and anthropomorphism on purchasing decisions (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024), this study found that some owners reported acting out of responsibility for their pet's needs even in the absence of a deep emotional connection. This nuance was not explicitly explored in the reviewed literature, suggesting that factors beyond attachment can motivate owners to invest in products and services for their pets.

The study also adds depth to the understanding of the post-purchase phase of the consumer decision process in the pet context. Although existing models include post-purchase evaluation and its link to satisfaction and loyalty (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2006), the findings revealed that some participants retrospectively evaluated past purchases, particularly non-essential or impulse buys like toys, and occasionally deemed them superfluous or unsuited to their pet's actual preferences or needs, which suggests that owners may apply a more rational or critical lens when reflecting on purchases initially driven by emotional factors or impulse, as supported by Akbar et al.'s (2020) research.

Contrary to broad claims of UGC dominance (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Jannat et al., 2025; Shetty et al., 2024), the findings reveal that for many participants, the overall influence of UGC on purchasing decisions is often limited or indirect. Decisions are frequently based on established knowledge, past experiences, the pet's specific needs and preferences, or trusted offline sources like veterinarians, pet store staff, or known friends and family. This suggests a more selective, critical, and context-dependent real-world behaviour than the literature might imply. Pet influencers were often viewed primarily for entertainment or inspiration, rarely triggering direct purchases.

While some research, performed by Bahtar and Muda (2016), Shetty et al. (2024) and Shuqair et al. (2016) suggests a shift towards greater trust in UGC over traditional advertising due to perceived authenticity, this study found a more balanced and varied picture. Participants' trust in UGC was found to be selective, based on specific factors such as effective demonstrations (especially videos), clear information, and the perceived credibility or professional knowledge of the content creator.

This study also provides empirical support for several key concepts established in the existing literature. The findings corroborate the literature on the significant role of the deep emotional bond between pet owners and their animals, which translates into a greater willingness to invest in their well-being, often influencing spending on non-essential or luxury goods (Boya et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2024). Additionally, the study reinforces Rahman and Pial's (2020) research, asserting that purchasing decisions are shaped by a dynamic interplay between emotional drivers and rational considerations. While emotional motivations like affection, the desire to pamper, or impulse play a role, rational factors such as quality, price, safety, nutritional content, and brand reputation remain critical considerations.

The findings further align well with the stages of the established consumer purchase decision process (Chaipradernsak, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2006), confirming the relevance of models like the five-stage framework for understanding pet-related purchasing behaviours. The study's findings provide rich, context-specific empirical examples for each stage.

As for managerial implications, brands and influencers aiming to better cater to consumers in the pet market must recognise that, for many pet owners, the overall influence of UGC on purchasing decisions is often limited or indirect. Owners frequently filter external information, including UGC, through their established knowledge, past experiences, their pet's specific needs, and trusted offline sources like veterinarians or store staff. Therefore, strategies should focus on building genuine trust and relevance. Brands and influencers can enhance the usefulness and trustworthiness of their content by providing effective demonstrations, especially through detailed videos showing products in real-world use and highlighting pet interaction and enjoyment, offering thorough information on nutritional analysis for food, scientific backing, or explanations of price-to-quality value. Emphasising the credibility, honesty, and perceived professional knowledge of the content creator (e.g., collaborating with veterinarians or nutritionists, or showcasing experienced, authentic pet owners) is crucial, as trust is not inherent to the format but earned through perceived honesty and usefulness. It is vital to connect product benefits directly to the pet's well-being, health, and happiness, aligning with the owner's deep emotional bond and sense of responsibility.

## 6.1. Limitations and Future Research

This qualitative study has sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the complex interplay between UGC and consumer behaviour in pet-related purchases, particularly through the lens of the pet-human relationship. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of the chosen approach and scope. These limitations not only define the boundaries of the current findings but also highlight promising avenues for future research.

This study employed semi-structured interviews to delve into the nuanced perspectives of pet owners regarding their purchasing decisions and relationships with their pets. While this qualitative approach provided rich, in-depth insights, the findings are inherently contextual and may not be broadly generalisable to the wider population of pet owners. To build on these insights, future quantitative research could be adopted, such as surveys or experiments, with larger and more diverse samples, which would allow for statistical analysis of the influence of UGC on purchasing behaviours across different demographics.

This study also found that while UGC is consumed, its direct influence on purchasing decisions is often limited or indirect for many participants. Future quantitative research could employ surveys or experimental designs to measure the relative impact of different types of UGC (e.g., reviews, influencer videos, peer recommendations) and brand advertising on purchase intentions across a larger, more diverse sample. Furthermore, quantitatively assessing the weight of specific trust factors identified in this study (e.g., video demonstrations, creator credibility, detailed information, scientific backing) could provide valuable insights for marketing strategies.

Another key limitation of this study includes sample specificity, as the research focused exclusively on Portuguese pet owners, particularly those who own dogs and cats. This narrow scope restricts the applicability of the findings to pet owners in other countries, those with different types of pets, or varying cultural contexts. For example, one participant residing in the UK highlighted differences in pet product availability, underscoring how geographic context can influence consumer behaviour. Considering this, future research

could encompass cross-cultural studies to provide a broader understanding of how cultural and geographic factors influence pet-related consumer behaviours.

Participants were recruited through the researcher's acquaintances, pet store customers, and referrals. Although broad, this non-random sampling method may have introduced selection bias, potentially gathering insights primarily from pet owners who are more engaged, sociable, or frequent visitors of specific pet stores, rather than a fully representative sample of the Portuguese pet-owning population. Employing randomised or stratified sampling techniques in future studies could mitigate these biases.

The study's reliance on self-reported data through interviews may also be subject to biases such as recall inaccuracies, social desirability or an inability to fully articulate subconscious motivations. Thus, further research could focus on incorporating observational methods or analysing actual purchasing data to provide more objective insights into pet owners' behaviours.

While the study touched upon participants making purchases out of a "sense of duty", rather than emotional attachment, this motivation was not deeply explored. Future studies could investigate the prevalence and impact of duty-driven purchases among pet owners. Understanding how these motivations compare to emotionally driven decisions could inform marketing strategies and product development.

Some participants mentioned perceiving certain past purchases as superfluous, but this study did not delve deeply into post-purchase regret. Exploring the factors leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with pet products, especially non-essential or impulse purchases, could provide insights into consumer decision-making processes, which could inform strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Further research could also explore the role of pets, particularly dogs, as facilitators of social interaction and community-building. A mixed-methods approach combining surveys and ethnographic observation could examine how pet ownership influences social capital, sense of belonging, and the development of interpersonal relationships in different settings (e.g., urban vs. rural areas).

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1 - Interviewees' Profiles

1 - Name	1 - Age	2 - Pet Type	3 - Adoption Timeline
Amanda	24	2 dogs, Lily and Caju, and a cat named Elvis.	I adopted Lily about 13 years ago, Caju 6 years ago, and Elvis 5 years ago.
Ana	34	A dog, named Roxy, and a cat, named Indy.	I adopted Roxy 14 years ago, and Indy 7 years ago.
Carlos	73	A dog named King.	I adopted him in 2012, 15 years ago.
Carolina	24	A dog named Babalu.	I adopted her 11 years ago.
Diana	42	A dog named Benny.	I adopted him three years ago, in May.
Fernanda	65	A cat named Mia.	I adopted her nearly 2 years ago.
Gabriela	22	A dog named Íris.	I adopted her about 3 years ago.
Helena	62	A cat named Zéquinha.	I rescued him from the street 3 years ago.
Inês	56	2 cats, Simba and Malhadinho, and a dog, named Aria.	The cats are about 15 years old and the dog is around 6 years old.
Isabel	52	2 cats, Safira and Mia, and a dog named Pete.	Pete was my mom's dog, and the cats were adopted by each of my sons, one six years ago and one during the pandemic.
João	28	A dog named Marley.	I got him in January 2019.
Mariana	26	A cat named Shady and a dog named Chica.	Shady's been with me for 3 years, and I adopted Chica last year.
Nilza	50	2 cats and care for a third from an abandoned village.	I adopted them in 2016 and 2021.
Paulo	23	2 female cats, named Kika and Lila.	I adopted them 2 years ago.
Pedro	24	2 dogs, Nala and Clarinha, and 2 cats, Ruca and Jinja.	Nala is 8, Clarinha is 5-6, and Ruca and Jinja are 4-5 years old.
Raquel	22	A dog named Lua.	I bought her 3 years ago.
Rita	39	2 cats, Balu and Micas.	I adopted them 14 years ago when they were under a year old.
Rodrigo	31	A cat named Zeus.	I bought him 5 months ago.

<b>Sérgio</b>	53	A dog named Murphy.	I bought him in May 2024 after seeing a Facebook post and a friend's tip.
<b>Tatiana</b>	51	6 cats, named Tico, Mel, Roger and Gilberto, Brutália and Oreo.	I adopted them between 13 and 5 years ago. I also used to foster rescues.

## Appendix 2 - Pet-Human Relationship

	4 - Other Decision-Makers	5 - Perception of Pet	6 - Relationship with Pet	7 - Impact on Daily Life	8 - Feelings During Interaction	9 - Activities with Pet	10 - Social Life Impact
<b>Amanda</b>	My mom also helps with decisions since I live with my parents.	They're like family.	I'm closer to Caju and Elvis, while Lily is more independent and harder to manage.	Their health and routine deeply affect me emotionally and daily.	I feel great, it's really nice! I play with them, and they keep me company when I'm alone.	I walk the dogs, play fetch, sing and dance with Caju, and pet Elvis when he allows it.	Yes, walking the dogs helps me meet and talk to people in the village. My cat, not so much, but sometimes I end up talking to the neighbours.
<b>Ana</b>	No one else influences pet purchases.	They are family.	I'm very close to my dog, while my cat is more distant.	Pets bring me comfort and emotional support.	I interact with them a lot and feel happy doing so.	We play, cuddle, go for walks, and rest together.	My dog boosts my social life more than my cat, but they both affect it.
<b>Carlos</b>	Yes, my wife also makes pet-related decisions.	I see him as a friend and family member.	We have a deep bond since he was a puppy, and we share daily rituals.	He brings me tranquility.	Interacting with him makes me feel great.	We walk, run, play, and occasionally, we go to the forest or beach together.	Yes, I've met other owners during walks.
<b>Carolina</b>	My parents used to help more when I was younger, but now I handle most purchases.	She means everything to me.	We're very close, and she always wants attention.	She lifts my mood and makes tough days better.	It always makes me feel great.	We go on walks, play, spend lots of quality time together, and I shower her with affection.	Only slightly, through small talk during walks.
<b>Diana</b>	Yes, my partner. He also has a	He's like a member of the family.	He's involved in every part of my routine, from meals to bedtime and cuddles.	He lifts my mood daily and brings me constant joy, even when he's mischievous.	Very good, he cheers me up a lot.	I walk him daily, visit my parents' backyard, play with toys and do cognitive games. At	Yes, I meet people at dog parks and on walks when they stop to talk about him.

	strong bond with Benny.					night, he cuddles with us on the couch.	
<b>Fernanda</b>	Yes, my husband shares responsibility but not purchasing decisions.	I see her as a family member who depends on me.	We have a very close bond and she's incredibly affectionate.	She brings peace, joy, and companionship, filling our home with warmth and love.	We interact constantly, and her affection makes me feel complete. She sleeps with us, and doesn't like strangers.	I feed her, play with her, cuddle and talk to her, and make improvised toys for her to play with. I want to take her out with me, but I'm still figuring out a way to do it.	Yes, she shapes our social life and daily routine, she brings us closer together and we adjust our plans because of her.
<b>Gabriela</b>	My parents also share the responsibility and help make purchases for her.	I see her as my best friend, a confidant and someone who's always there for me.	I care for her in the mornings and evenings, and my dad looks after her during the day when I'm not home. We're very close.	She helps me emotionally, especially when I'm stressed or anxious. Just her presence makes me feel more at ease.	I interact with her a lot, it makes me feel happy, whole and complete.	We walk in the forest, play fetch, and go on car rides. We also cuddle a lot.	Yes, people approach us when I take her out, which helps me socialise.
<b>Helena</b>	No, just me, he's very picky.	I see him as a pet and good companion, not a child.	We have a great relationship, though he's independent.	He senses when I'm sad or sick and stays nearby, he's loyal.	I pet, brush, and feed him, and sometimes I even cook for him.	He wakes me up, sits on my lap while I read, and I brush and pet him daily.	Yes, in a way, I always chat to the pet store clerk, and I skip outings and trips so he's not left alone.
<b>Inês</b>	Yes, my husband and daughter help with purchases, mostly because it's convenient.	As part of the family.	I'm very close to the cats who live indoors. Since the dog lives nearby, I'm not as close to her, but I visit her daily.	I wake up earlier for them, feed them and clean their litter box. Cuddling the cats really lifts my mood. The dog also influences my day quite a bit, however, bad weather makes caring for her harder.	It makes me feel really good.	I play with the cats and cuddle them and I brush and play fetch with the dog very often.	Not much, it occasionally comes up in conversation.
<b>Isabel</b>	No, it's mostly me. My older son occasionally helps, but I'm the one who decides most of the time.	They mean the world to me. They're always there, especially Pete who senses when I'm coming home.	I'm have a good relationship with them. Mia sleeps with me, Safira stays more with my sons, and Pete gets excited for walks.	They lift my mood after bad days and fit well into my routine, with help from my mom.	I feel great being with them, I need animals around me.	I walk and play with Pete, and toss balls or toy mice with the cats. We also cuddle and sometimes sleep together.	Not at all.

<b>João</b>	My wife helps make pet-related decisions and care for him.	I see him like a child.	He's like a son, spoiled but disciplined. I give him the best of everything, and he has full freedom around the house.	He affects my life a lot. I always consider his well-being when I'm making plans. Emotionally, he can make me anxious sometimes, but when I'm feeling down and need affection, he's always there.	I feel great! It's very nice having him around.	We go for walks, I talk to him, give him lots of affection, and some discipline, when it's needed. I take him to parks, the beach, and to the groomer.	Yes, I've made friends and networked thanks to him.
<b>Mariana</b>	No, I make all the decisions for my pets.	Shady feels like my son, and Chica feels like a niece.	It's a very affectionate bond, we're really close.	They affect my routine a lot, and they also bring me joy. When I get home, I get very happy to have them around, because they make my house feel full.	They bring me a lot of joy.	I brush them, play with them, give them cuddles and affection.	Yes, especially because my cat greets visitors at the door. I also meet people while walking my dog.
<b>Nilza</b>	No.	They're cool gals, companions who are part of the family.	They mostly ignore me, but I can't live without them.	They affect me a lot. Their presence is comforting, even when they wake me early. They sleep with me and it's comforting to have them curled up next to me.	Great! I talk to them like people, and that brings me comfort. Just looking at them is also relaxing.	I play with them, especially with a pom-pom, and brush them. I hate changing litter.	A bit, mostly making adjustments when people visit.
<b>Paulo</b>	Yes, my mom also buys some things for them.	They're like family and very important to me.	I play with them whenever I'm home, especially during work breaks.	They help me a lot emotionally, especially when I'm stressed or sad.	It's very calming and uplifting to be with them.	I play with them using toys, throw things for them to chase, and cuddle a lot.	Yes, they're a common topic with my mom and friends.
<b>Pedro</b>	My parents and sister also buy things for the pets when needed.	They're my companions and they're always there for me.	I interact daily with the cats indoors and play with the dogs outside.	They cheer me up and make me feel better emotionally. They affect my daily life since I have to care and clean up after them.	I feel happier, and I think I make them happy too.	I walk the dogs, and hang out with them at home. With the cats, I play around and tease them.	Yes, I meet people while walking the dogs and talk about pets at home or with friends. Sometimes, while chatting, that also comes up.
<b>Raquel</b>	My boyfriend, brother, and parents help or influence	She's like a daughter to me.	We're very close, she's my friend and confidante and she senses when I'm sad.	A lot, I take on walks almost every day and when she's at my parents place I feel like my house is empty.	It makes me happy and fulfilled.	We walk daily and play indoors when it rains. She runs after her toys and we play tug.	Yes, she makes me feel more relaxed and social outside. Also, when I'm walking her, people always want to pet her.

	purchases sometimes.									
<b>Rita</b>	My husband helps make decisions and cares deeply for them.	They're part of the family.	They're like children to me, and I always consider their needs.	They bring me joy and positively impact my routine and well-being.	It makes me feel good and it doesn't feel like a chore.	I take them outside daily and supervise them outdoors. I also give them affection tailored to their personalities.	Yes, I avoid long trips and sometimes skip social events due to their care needs.			
<b>Rodrigo</b>	No, it's just me.	He's like a son to me, a little baby.	He's a sweet companion who boosts my mood just by being there.	Just being around him makes me happy and relieves stress and playing and taking care of him brings me joy.	We interact constantly, it makes me feel great.	We play, watch TV, and go outside in a cat backpack.	Yes, people often talk to me because of his size.			
<b>Sérgio</b>	Yes, my wife and son also influence decisions and help care for him.	He's almost like a son now, and I spoil him more than anyone.	We're very close, he follows me everywhere and brings joy to my days.	Taking him out can be a hassle, but it keeps us both active and improves my mood. He brings a sense of routine and purpose to my life.	I interact with him a lot, and it lifts my spirits. Having him around makes me feel better without even realising it.	We do hygiene, play, relax together, and go on walks. I also take him to professional grooming.	Absolutely, I adjust plans to avoid leaving him alone and choose pet-friendly vacation spots. My social life is definitely shaped around his needs.			
<b>Tatiana</b>	No.	They're my companions and part of the family.	Each cat is different, some clingy, some distant. There's a clear hierarchy between them.	They bring me joy and stress, especially when they're sick.	I only interact with them in ways they allow, but I feel great doing it.	We cuddle, play with paper balls, and some sleep with us.	Not really, though I talk to more people due to my involvement in a cat group.			

### Appendix 3 - Purchase decision-making process

	11 - Product Purchasing Locations	12 - Buying Process	13 - Typical Products	14 - Distinctive Purchase	15 - Product Need Triggers	16 - Research Before Purchase	17 - Information Sources	18 - Trust in Sources	19 - Factors Considered in Purchases	20 - Repurchasing Products	21 - Brand Loyalty	22 - Trying New Brands
<b>Amanda</b>	Mostly online for price, and sometimes	I buy kibble during online promotions	I usually buy food, treats, and sometimes	I recently bought stainless steel bowls and a new bed for	I buy when they need something or to cheer them	I research food and health	I mostly rely on my vet and occasionally	I trust the vet because he's experienced and	I prioritize price, but aim for good value	Yes, for example, with kibble, I always	I'm loyal to Libra kibble because it works well	I only try new treats or toys,

	supermarkets.	and treats occasionally from the supermarket.	toys, but it's rare.	Caju due to need.	up, especially when they need to stay inside more due to the weather.	products, not treats or toys.	see things on TikTok.	knowledgeable.	and quality.	buy the same brand.	and caused no issues.	and not very often.
<b>Ana</b>	I buy from supermarkets, pet stores, and online.	I buy based on need and health benefits.	I mostly buy kibble and treats. I rarely buy toys.	I bought a Christmas hat and warm jacket recently.	I buy when essentials run out or as a treat.	I research often, especially for supplements and kibble.	I consult other vets, TikTok, websites, and magazines.	I trust vets the most. TikTok is not very reliable but sometimes I find good products in there, and magazines are somewhat reliable.	I prioritize quality, price, and pet benefits.	Yes, I always buy the same kibble but I switch the treats occasionally, to give them different flavours.	I'm loyal to Royal Canin and Purina. The treats vary.	About every two months, mostly because I'm switching treats.
<b>Carlos</b>	Mostly at local pet stores.	I choose good-quality food that fits my budget and his needs. Sometimes I chat with the shopkeeper, who might recommend a different product within the same range I usually buy.	Kibble, biscuits, some treats, and a few toys.	I bought him a mattress to make his doghouse more comfortable.	I buy out of necessity or to spoil him.	I usually rely on shopkeeper advice, and I usually don't research online.	Primarily, the vet and the pet store owner.	I trust them due to their experience.	I buy as if it were for a loved family member, and I always aim to choose what's best for him.	Yes, if I buy a new kibble and he likes it, I buy it again.	Not really, I tend to switch dog food brands every few years.	Rarely, only on trusted advice.

<b>Carolina</b>	I buy kibble from the pet hotel she stays at when we go on holidays, and toys in pet stores. I rarely buy online.	I focus on safety, materials, and whether she'll enjoy it. If I'm buying online, I always check reviews.	I mostly buy hygiene products, treats, and kibble. Occasionally, I buy toys and wet food.	I recently bought joint supplements on a recommendation.	I go by intuition or when I see something I think she'll like.	I research online sometimes, mostly on TikTok. But usually I buy in physical stores, so I don't research.	TikTok and friends who also have pets.	Because of the personal experiences they share with their own pets. I also usually watch multiple videos to make sure the products are actually good.	I care most about durability, safety, and benefits.	Yes.	Just her dog food, it has all the nutrients she needs, and she's been eating it since she was very young.	Very rarely, I prefer sticking to what I know.
<b>Diana</b>	I buy his food at the vet due to allergies. Treats and toys come from pet stores or occasionally the supermarket. We don't buy much online anymore.	I'm careful with ingredients because of his allergies, but I often find fun extras while shopping.	I regularly buy food, medication, toys, treats, and warm clothes.	Recently I bought cognitive games to mentally stimulate him.	I buy what's needed or what I think he'll enjoy, or when something wears out.	I research new kibble or treats but not other items like toys.	I rely on my vet and pet store staff, especially for food advice.	Because of their experience.	The ingredients and overall quality. I need to make sure the food has no beef or pork, because of his allergies, and I avoid generic brands.	Yes, especially his kibble, due to his specific needs.	Yes, I can't switch brands much because of his allergies.	I rarely try new products unless they meet his restrictions and come with a sample.
<b>Fernanda</b>	I buy from a nearby pet store.	I ask the clerk for advice, then choose and buy.	I often buy litter, dry and wet food, and toys like hair ties.	I recently bought her beige and white hair ties because she loves playing with them. I don't buy many toys but I save cardboard boxes	I buy essentials when running low and rotate wet food flavors to keep her interested.	I usually don't, I rely on the pet store employee for information.	The employee at the pet store.	I trust her because she's trained and well-reviewed by others.	Quality.	Yes.	Yes, I'm loyal to the brand she likes, I just switch the flavors.	Occasionally, when I get free samples and she enjoys them.

				for her to play with.								
<b>Gabriela</b>	I usually shop at pet stores.	I go to the store, pick up her usual food, and pay.	I often buy kibble, biscuits, dental snacks, and toys.	I bought a plush toy she loved and tartar biscuits that helped her breath.	I buy food out of necessity and other products for health or entertainment.	I usually don't research. I rely on store staff.	I only consult the lady at the pet store.	I trust her because she's knowledgeable and her advice has worked.	Price and quality.	Yes.	I'm loyal to Advance because my dog likes it.	I rarely try new food but sometimes I get different toys.
<b>Helena</b>	Mostly at a pet store, and sometimes at the supermarket.	I shop regularly, always changing kibble flavors and buying litter monthly, and wet food weekly.	I buy kibble, biscuits, wet food, some toys, and litter.	I recently grilled tuna for him, he loves it.	I buy because I care for him and want to make his life better.	Sometimes, mostly asking friends or the pet store clerk.	I use TikTok, Google, friends who own pets, the vet, and the pet store clerk.	I trust the people I ask, and on the internet, I cross-check the info and ask the vet if I'm unsure.	I value quality over price and avoid generic brands.	Not usually. He's picky so I have to switch things up.	I stick to Royal Canin, it's high quality and he tolerates it.	Frequently, due to his pickiness.
<b>Inês</b>	I usually buy from pet stores.	I talk to the store staff and choose what seems best.	Mostly food, litter, some toys, treats, and wet food.	I recently bought a dental product for my cat's bad breath, based on staff advice.	I buy when I'm running low or want to treat them.	I don't research online, but I ask pet store staff or the vet.	Mainly the pet store staff and occasionally the vet.	I trust them because they're trained, experienced, and have given good advice.	Quality and price matter most.	Yes.	Yes, Dibaq for the cats. For the dog I switch brands between the ones I already trust, such as Dibaq, Advance, and Arion.	Occasionally, based on staff recommendations.
<b>Isabel</b>	I shop mostly at a local pet store and	I check what they like and ask the store	I regularly buy dry and wet food, litter, cat	I bought a large scratching tower for the cats,	I buy what's needed and sometimes toys or treats	I don't research much. I trust	Mainly the lady at the pet store. I'm used to her,	Because of her experience.	I care most about healthy, quality	Yes.	For the dog, yes, I always buy the same brand. For the	I try new cat products every

	sometimes get litter at the supermarket . I rarely shop online.	employee for advice.	grass, and flea pills.	because they needed it.	to make them happy.	the pet store lady.	and she's my go-to advisor.		food and avoid supermarket brands that have caused issues.		cats, I switch it up because they get bored easily.	few months based on the store assistant recommendation.
<b>João</b>	I shop in pet stores and supermarkets, and sometimes online.	I usually buy what catches my eye.	Mostly kibble, treats, and toys. I rarely buy accessories.	I recently bought him a filled bone treat I thought he'd enjoy.	I buy to meet needs or add variety.	I rarely research now, only did it for kibble when I first got Murphy.	I ask staff at the pet store.	I trust them because they know the products.	Quality, I won't give him supermarket-brand food.	Yes, I rebuy things like his kibble, brush, salmon oil, and deworming pills.	I'm loyal to the current kibble brand.	Sometimes.
<b>Mariana</b>	I usually shop at pet stores. I don't usually buy online, because most brands I like don't ship to Portugal.	I compare products, prices, and usefulness before buying.	I buy snacks, kibble, litter, toys, brushes, and malt paste most often.	I bought food on sale and dehydrated turkey strips.	I buy when I see something useful, not necessarily out of need.	I don't usually research, but I did for a water fountain.	I use Google, Safari, chat with friends, or ask in stores.	I trust these sources because they're knowledgeable and reliable.	I care about usefulness, pet enjoyment, and price-to-quality ratio.	Yes.	I'm loyal to food and treat brands but not toy brands.	Quite often. If I think a product is good, I'll try it.
<b>Nilza</b>	I buy their kibble at online pet stores due to health needs.	I used to order through a friend, but now I look for good	I mainly buy food, litter, dewormers, and occasional	I've bought beds a while ago, but besides that, I haven't made big purchases, just essentials.	I buy things only when needed.	Rarely, only for specific concerns.	I trust vets and sometimes pharmacists.	Because they're professionals.	I care about hygiene, food quality, and price.	Yes.	Yes, especially for kibble and dewormers.	Occasionally with wet food, if they refuse

		online deals.	toys or wet food.									to eat dry food.
<b>Paulo</b>	I shop online, in pet stores, and sometimes at pharmacies or supermarkets.	I stuck with a brand that gave a sample the cats loved and delivers to my house.	Mostly kibble, litter, flea pipettes, and occasional toys.	I recently bought a scratching post because the old one wore out.	When they need food, stimulation, or something breaks.	I don't research often since I already found good products.	Mostly word-of-mouth and past experiences.	Because they come from people I trust.	I look at price, brand reputation, and quality.	Yes, I stick with what works.	Yes, the kibble brand, they love it.	Sometimes, if I see something interesting.
<b>Pedro</b>	Mostly supermarkets, sometimes online if there are promotions.	I buy kibble when it's running low or on sale, and pick up treats or toys if I see them.	Mainly kibble, some toys, and treats.	I bought medicine and treats for Ruca after a vet visit.	Running low on food or seeing treats/toys on sale triggers a purchase.	I only researched kibble initially with advice from vet friends.	I check Kunto Kusta, Google, and ask my vet student friends.	I trust Kunto Kusta because it's reliable in comparing prices from different websites. I also trust the vet students because I think they're knowledgeable and reliable sources.	Price and value for money matter most.	Yes, I stick with food and treats they like.	I like Advance but I'm not strongly loyal to any brand.	I buy new brands mostly for non-food items at the supermarket.
<b>Raquel</b>	I shop at pet stores, the vet, and online for variety.	I buy food when needed and get toys/clothes while browsing online.	I mostly buy kibble, wet food, toys, perfume sprays, and clothes.	I recently bought wet food and a flea and tick collar for prevention.	Food is essential, while other stuff is mostly for fun or photos.	I don't research food because I ask my brother. For clothes and accessories, I scroll online around holidays.	Mostly Shein and Temu for clothes and toys, and my brother for food.	Because I've had good experiences buying online, and since my brother is a vet, I trust his judgement.	I look for good ingredients, comfort, and if toys make noise.	Yes, especially toys she loves, but food needs variety.	No, I switch brands because she's very picky.	Quite often, especially with food.

<b>Rita</b>	I mostly shop online, and sometimes at supermarkets.	I research thoroughly and read reviews before buying.	I often buy dry food, litter, and natural wet food.	I recently bought a toy glove and self-moving balls after research.	Health issues or necessity usually trigger purchases.	I research almost every time before buying, even if it's just reading reviews.	I use Grok AI now, and vet blogs and reviews before.	AI makes research faster and easier, just like I used to do.	Quality matters most, and I'll pay more for it.	Yes, especially Encore wet food, the natural brand I use, though I switch flavours sometimes.	I'm loyal to Encore because it's high quality and they like it.	I try new products when they lose interest in old ones.
<b>Rodrigo</b>	I buy from both pet stores and online.	I'm flexible with toys but very careful with food due to his allergies.	I mainly buy kibble, litter, toys, brushes, and dental products.	I recently bought dental and ear cleaning products.	I buy based on necessity and his quality of life.	A lot.	I use ChatGPT, YouTube, and consult my vet.	I cross-check info and trust my vet the most.	Quality. Even if something seems unnecessary, if it improves his life, it's worth it.	Yes, I repurchase what works, especially his food and toys.	Yes, I'm loyal to his food brand due to health needs.	I rarely change food but try new toy brands.
<b>Sérgio</b>	I shop at a local pet store, and sometimes online or at supermarkets.	I always buy the same food brand, safe chew bones, and prioritize health.	I mostly buy food, flea treatments, and toys.	I recently bought buffalo bones, cow hooves, and an activity mat for mental stimulation.	I buy products to ensure his well-being and fix past mistakes with my old dog.	I researched a lot early on, now only when needed or trying something new. For toys, I check their durability and safety.	I use the internet, a vet, an animal nutritionist, and a pharmacist.	I trust experts and cross-check online info by reading reviews.	Quality and toy durability are most important.	Yes, I repurchase kibble and flea treatments that work well.	I'm loyal to the "Origem" brand because it's been great for him.	I try something new about once a month alongside regular purchases.
<b>Tatiana</b>	Mostly online for kibble, and at supermarkets for wet	I compare prices online, and buy based on urgency and stock.	Kibble, litter, and wet food. I rarely buy toys.	I recently bought elevated bowls and a toy mouse.	I restock when running low and buy better food when on sale.	Only for kibble and specific health needs.	Kuanto Kusta, vet, and the "Gatos Urbanos" group.	I trust them due to experience and professionalism.	I look for quality at a good price, and I usually avoid	Yes, I repurchase effective products to avoid digestive issues.	Yes, I'm loyal to the same kibble and wet food brands.	Rarely.

	food and litter.								general brands.			
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### Appendix 4 - Pet-human relationship and the purchase decision

	23 - Pet-Relationship Influence	24 - Lifestyle Influences	25 - Purchasing from Recommendations	26 - Attitude Toward Premium Products	27 - Spending on Pet	28 - Impulse Purchases	29 - Superfluous Purchases
<b>Amanda</b>	It doesn't, even with Lily, whom I don't have such a strong bond with, I still try to give her comfort and care.	Not really, but we do make small adjustments like closing gates for Caju.	I don't think so. Not that I remember, and it's definitely not common.	I spend more only when it's necessary for their health.	I don't think I spend too much. I just spend what I have to. Although sometimes the vet bills can be high, that's just a part of having pets.	Yes, I once bought a Halloween costume just for fun.	Yes, the costume and some hair clips for Lily that didn't work out.
<b>Ana</b>	Pet health and personalities influence my choices.	Yes, I adjust my schedule and habits around my pets.	Rarely, but I've bought grooming tools because of recommendations.	I will pay more for quality, especially when it comes to food.	Yes, especially on health-related expenses.	Yes, the Christmas hat was impulsive.	Yes, some toys that they completely ignored.
<b>Carlos</b>	His preferences guide my choices. It's like respecting his preferences.	Yes, I consider him when planning vacations, for example.	Not that I remember.	I'm definitely willing to pay more for certain benefits, as long as it fits my budget.	No, I've spent a lot, but never unnecessarily.	Maybe a toy I found interesting.	No, he always ends up using what I buy.
<b>Carolina</b>	Not much, I'd care for her regardless of our bond.	A bit, for example, I need to walk her because she doesn't go out on her own, but besides that, not much.	Yes, but not often.	I'm willing to buy them, if the benefits are worth it compared to cheaper options.	No, I just meet her needs.	Not really, my purchases are usually practical.	No, honestly, never.
<b>Diana</b>	Yes, I buy things based on his preferences, like noisy toys and chicken-flavoured food.	Definitely. He gets me out walking, changes how I travel and dine, and shapes my daily life.	Yes, my sister recommended allergy-safe chew bones, and I've bought them ever since.	It depends, but if it's for his well-being and quality of life, then I'm willing to pay more.	Yes, I sometimes overspend on cute toys or clothes just because I like them.	Yes, not often, but whenever I see something cute or something I think he'll enjoy.	Yes. I just thought he would like it.

<b>Fernanda</b>	A lot. I always want to give her the best and please her.	Yes, I shape my schedule and habits around her needs.	No.	I'm willing to pay more if the product has real benefits.	Sometimes, especially when my husband gives her extra wet food.	Yes, I bought her a pink bed and blanket on impulse to make her feel cosy when she's alone.	Yes, I bought a leash and bouncy balls, but she didn't use them.
<b>Gabriela</b>	I care deeply for her. I buy new things to keep her mentally stimulated, and give her new experiences.	Yes, I adjust plans to care for her, like vacations or walks after work.	Yes, but I mostly follow the store lady's advice, not friends'.	I'll pay more if it's necessary or recommended by the vet.	No, I only spend what I feel is necessary.	No.	Only once. She didn't like a squeaky toy I bought.
<b>Helena</b>	I'm constantly looking for things he might enjoy.	Definitely, I avoid long trips and outings. When I need to leave for some time I hire someone to come and take care of him.	Yes, I have friends who suggest products.	Quality comes first. I mostly buy premium products.	Yes, I often say he'll bankrupt me.	Yes, I've bought toys and cod on impulse.	Yes, the cod, a teddy bear, and a failed leash.
<b>Inês</b>	If they like something, I'll buy it again. I enjoy seeing them happy and healthy.	Yes, I plan my schedule and trips around them.	No.	I'll pay more, especially for their health and well-being.	No, I think what I spend is reasonable and necessary.	Yes, I once bought yoghurts/ice cream and kefir for the cats, after a staff recommendation.	Yes, those same yoghurts/ice cream and kefir. The cats didn't like them.
<b>Isabel</b>	It doesn't. Even if they were more distant, it wouldn't change how I care for them.	Not really. I have my mother and sons to care for them when I'm away, although I always worry a little.	No, I'm not easily influenced.	I already buy premium products when necessary. I don't mind spending more money for their well-being.	Yes, I spend a lot, but it's normal. I chose to have them, so I have to take good care of them.	Yes, toys, just to spoil them.	Yes, I've bought toy balls they didn't use, I've never had regrets about food.
<b>João</b>	It doesn't influence it. I'd buy the same things regardless of our relationship.	Yes, we plan life around not leaving him alone.	Yes, I've followed fellow owners' recommendations.	If it offers better benefits I'm willing to pay more.	I don't think so.	Yes, I've bought toys and a water fountain on impulse.	Yes, some impulse buys turned out unnecessary.
<b>Mariana</b>	I buy them many things because I love them.	Yes, for example, I need to plan vacations carefully because they need	Yes.	I'll buy them, especially if there's a health reason or it truly benefits them.	Yes, I knowingly spend more for better quality.	Yes, I impulsively bought a toy they ignored.	Yes, I bought an expensive scratching post when I already had one.

		attention and can't be left alone.					
<b>Nilza</b>	I don't impulse buy much, but I get them treats and I get cleaning supplies because of them.	Definitely, they shape my travel and daily habits.	Yes, I've bought wet food and a litter box. I was once deinfluenced by a friend as well.	I might buy them. I already spend extra for health-related food.	No, I stick to the basics, they're like little welfare cases!	Yes, once I bought a grooming glove.	No, I don't think so.
<b>Paulo</b>	If they need something, I'll buy it. But I usually don't buy things if there's no need.	Yes, they make me more active and I plan vacations around them.	Yes, I really value word-of-mouth advice.	I buy premium only when necessary, like for health reasons.	No, I stick to essentials.	No, I avoid impulse buying.	No.
<b>Pedro</b>	I want to buy good things for them because I care.	Yes, they make me go out more and influence where I plan to live.	Yes, my vet friends are also pet owners and they have given good recommendations.	I usually don't buy premium, unless they're sick and need special care.	No, I look for good value and buy what's needed.	Maybe an occasional toy, but I wouldn't call it impulsive.	I don't think so.
<b>Raquel</b>	I buy things just to make her happy because it makes me happy.	Yes, my routine and travel plans revolve around her.	Yes, I've bought things my parents recommended.	I wouldn't mind paying more for better quality.	Yes, I get non-essential toys and clothes just because I enjoy it and I think she does too.	Yes, especially cute clothes I find online.	Yes, a food-dispensing toy that she never used.
<b>Rita</b>	I see them as family, so I take their care seriously.	Yes, we even take them with us when we travel for long periods. We need to consider their well-being in our choices.	Yes, like malt paste for hairballs, based on a friend's tip.	I would definitely pay more for certain benefits, quality is a priority.	Maybe, but they're family, so it feels justified.	Yes, I buy toys impulsively hoping they'll enjoy them.	Yes, most toys. They prefer cardboard boxes.
<b>Rodrigo</b>	Our bond makes me want to spoil him.	Yes, I plan my routine and vacations around him.	Yes, I tried tofu litter based on a friend's advice.	I buy them, for instance, I only give him Royal Canin because of its quality.	Yes, I go beyond basics to give him a better life.	No, except maybe adopting him.	No, I don't think so.
<b>Sérgio</b>	I now choose high-quality food and safe toys due to past experience.	Not too much, although this year we looked for vacation spots that accepted pets, which limited our options.	Yes, I followed kibble and toy recommendations from friends and the groomer.	I believe that investing in better products pays off, both for his well-being and for ours.	Maybe, but I see it as necessary for his quality of life.	Yes, mostly amusing toys bought on impulse.	I may have bought too many toys, but he eventually uses them.

<b>Tatiana</b>	I try to buy the best quality I can afford because I care for them.	Yes, caring for them shapes my routine and choices. For instance, I stopped fostering other pets because my own are getting older and it stresses them out.	Yes, for specific issues based on recommendations.	I buy mid-range quality to avoid future health issues and if one of them is sick, I buy vet-prescribed products.	Yes, mostly due to vet costs.	Yes, like cute toys or emergency carriers.	Yes, like a water fountain that they didn't use.
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### Appendix 5 - Digitalisation and User-Generated Content

	30 - Social Media Usage	31 - Interaction with Pet Content	32 - Following Pet Influencers	33 - Purchasing Due to UGC	34 - Purchasing Due to Pet Influencers	35 - Purchasing Due to Advertisements	36 - Preferred UGC Types	37 - Most Trusted UGC:	38 - UGC vs. Brand Advertising Trust	39 - Making UGC More Useful	40 - Overall Impact of UGC	41 - Posting Reviews
<b>Amanda</b>	I use Instagram a lot, Facebook a bit, and scroll through TikTok.	Yes, mostly with funny pet videos, and I notice more show up after talking about pets.	I follow my vet and some influencers who have pets but who's focus is not pet content.	Not for pets.	No.	Only if there's a site promotion, but not because of regular ads.	I love funny and sentimental pet videos, like dogs at weddings.	I trust reviews that feel honest and are not sponsored. I also like when pets are shown using the products.	I trust UGC more than ads if it seems genuine and unsponsored.	I prefer small influencers, they feel more real and less sales-focused.	UGC doesn't affect me much unless the price is within my budget.	Yes, once I posted a review for a recycled bed made by a friend.
<b>Ana</b>	I use Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok.	Yes, a lot.	Yes, I follow some pet-related accounts, and sometimes this type of content pops-up even if I'm not following.	No.	No.	Only once, from an Instagram ad for a handmade jacket.	I like funny, informative, and creative content.	I trust content made by veterinarians.	I trust brand ads more, especially with vet backing.	I'd trust more if the content was based on scientific articles or real research, and if it was more transparent.	It doesn't influence me much.	No.

<b>Carlos</b>	No, I don't use social media.	No.	No.	No, but if I find an article online about my dog's breed recommending a product, I might buy it.	No.	Usually not, but I've looked up brands after seeing TV ads.	I prefer articles, they seem more trustworthy.	I trust vets' and pet shop owners' advice most.	I trust real people more than ads, especially owners of similar breeds.	I'd trust content more if it felt genuine, well-intentioned and was explained well by vets.	Not at all.	No.
<b>Carolina</b>	Yes, I use Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok.	Yes, it appears often, especially content from shelters and veterinarians.	Yes, I follow people who post about animals, even if it's not their main focus.	I don't think so.	Not for pet-related products.	No, that's never happened either.	I love emotional shelter stories.	I trust real user videos the most.	I trust regular users more than brand ads.	I prefer seeing products in person to build trust.	It doesn't influence me much.	No.
<b>Diana</b>	Yes, Instagram and TikTok.	Yes, sometimes it shows up. Mostly entertaining videos.	I follow an animal behaviour account on Instagram that I really like.	Not that I remember.	No.	Maybe once from a TV ad, but I'm not sure.	Written information and videos. This way I can see for myself.	Videos, because I can see things clearly.	I generally don't trust much of what I see online. I trust physical store staff and the vet much more.	Content is more trustworthy if it comes from experts with clear reasons.	User content has minimal influence due to Benny's needs, however, my last dog would've been different.	I've never reviewed a product, but I post photos of Benny on Instagram and if someone asks for a specific product I'll share it.
<b>Fernanda</b>	Yes, I use Facebook.	Yes, I often see and interact with pet-related content.	Yes, I follow "Gatos Urbanos", her vet, and others that appear.	No.	No.	No.	I enjoy funny videos and informative posts, especially about	I trust content from people I know or follow.	I trust real people that I know more, otherwise I trust brands.	Knowing the person would make it more trustworthy.	It doesn't.	I once shared a positive experience with a food sample when my cat was

							rescued animals.					sick, but that's not usual.
<b>Gabriela</b>	Yes, I mainly use Instagram and TikTok.	Yes, especially on Instagram, where it appears quite often.	Yes, I follow "Intervenção Animal" and "Canil de Coimbra" for updates and adoption info.	No.	No.	No.	I enjoy videos of dogs with babies or rescues by "Intervenção Animal".	I trust videos and photos most, though I rarely look for them.	I trust user content more than ads because it's based on real experiences.	Content needs to be clear, well-presented, and made by knowledgeable people to be useful.	It doesn't. I've only been influenced by people I know or the lady at the store.	No, never.
<b>Helena</b>	I use Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.	Yes, I watch a lot of pet videos on TikTok.	No, but I enjoy watching pet videos.	No.	No, but I'm considering a backpack carrier and a car seat I saw on TikTok.	No.	I enjoy short, cute cat or panda videos.	I usually don't trust it, if unsure, I ask the vet.	I trust user content a bit more, but I'm cautious.	I'd trust it more if they analyzed nutritional value of local brands.	Usually, it doesn't.	No, I don't do that.
<b>Inês</b>	Yes, I use Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.	Yes, I often watch pet-related videos.	I don't follow influencers, but I follow pet stores and brands for info.	No.	No.	No.	I like to watch entertaining videos of pets playing around.	I trust videos most. I don't usually read the comments.	I trust brands more, but repeated UGC that aligns with the brand's advertisement might convince me to try. Anyway, I'd want to try the product first.	Comparisons and showing pets using the products would help.	It doesn't affect me much, but it depends on how the product is presented and the comparisons made.	No.
<b>Isabel</b>	Yes, Facebook and WhatsApp.	Yes, I see and enjoy pet videos and posts.	I follow "Patudos", "Gatos Urbanos", and	No, I haven't bought anything based on	Never, not from pet influencers or	No.	I enjoy rescue stories, wholesome pet videos	I'm not easily influenced, but I'd trust videos more, because you	I don't trust either, I prefer real people.	I'm not much into social media, even though I use it. I prefer in-	It doesn't.	No.

			the Coimbra shelter.	user suggestions.	regular ones.		and lost pet posts. I've helped save a few animals myself.	can see what's real.		person contact, as it gives me more confidence.		
<b>João</b>	I use Instagram and TikTok.	Yes, I often watch dog videos.	No, I don't follow them, just watch for fun.	Yes, I bought Vivadogs after I saw an acquaintance mention it on Instagram, although that doesn't happen often.	Yes, I've tried kibble promoted by an influencer before.	Yes, I've bought things after seeing ads.	I enjoy funny pet interaction videos.	I trust videos because they show how things work.	I trust real people more, especially those I know. I still trust brands to a degree.	I buy based on what I believe in, not just what I see.	Social media doesn't influence me, my dog does.	I don't remember, maybe for the dog food. It depends on the moment.
<b>Mariana</b>	Yes, I use Facebook and Instagram.	Yes, I follow lots of cat pages and brands, it's fun and helpful.	Yes, I follow "Gato Miu" and love their content and product suggestions. I also follow "Gatos Urbanos".	Yes, often, because I imagine how happy my pets would be.	No, I tried but the brands didn't ship to Europe.	Yes, I've bought things after seeing social media ads.	I enjoy cute or funny cat videos that make me smile.	I trust videos that show real-life product use and storytelling.	I trust personal feedback more than brand ads.	Real demos showing features and usage would help me trust more.	It influences me a lot, especially through reviews.	No.
<b>Nilza</b>	Yes, I use Facebook and Instagram.	Yes, pet content shows up a lot, I follow a rescue group.	Yes, I follow "Gatos Urbanos" and "Patatas e Patinhas".	No.	No.	No.	I enjoy all the silly cat videos because they're just funny.	I don't really trust any user content.	I trust neither user content nor brand ads.	I'm just sceptical, it's hard to make it trustworthy.	It doesn't.	No.
<b>Paulo</b>	Yes, I use Twitter,	Not much.	No.	No.	No.	No, except for	I enjoy funny	I trust videos because I can	I trust user content more, it	I'd trust someone	It can influence me,	No.

	Instagram, and WhatsApp.					the kibble I buy, which is from a brand that gave samples and delivers.	videos of silly pets.	see how the products work.	feels more honest.	known for honest, detailed reviews.	but I need to trust the source.	
<b>Pedro</b>	Yes, mostly Instagram.	Yes, I watch and share funny pet videos and some dog training videos.	Yes, I follow some pages for funny videos.	No, but I'm open to it if the person seems credible.	No, but I would consider it if the person seemed trustworthy and the product was within budget.	Yes, if the brand offers a good deal.	Funny, cute, and informative videos, especially for dog training.	Videos that show how products work.	I trust brands more because I don't see many user reviews.	The person needs to seem confident and have clear, organized content.	Not much, since I don't buy a lot.	Yes, I leave reviews when I feel the seller deserves it.
<b>Raquel</b>	Yes, mostly TikTok and Instagram.	Yes, very often.	Yes, I follow product pages, pet training accounts and cute pet accounts.	Yes, occasionally I buy things I see recommended online.	Yes, sometimes their content inspires me to spoil her more.	Yes, I've bought collars and leashes from ads, but not often.	I love cute and funny pet videos, especially with babies.	I trust genuine user comments the most.	I trust UGC more than brand ads because it feels more honest.	More videos showing real use would make UGC better.	Quite a bit, somewhere between moderate and high.	I've only shared opinions with friends, not online.
<b>Rita</b>	Yes, mostly Instagram.	Yes, I interact a lot with pet-related content.	Yes, I follow shelters and some pet owners.	Yes, like the cat-shaped glove I bought for Micas.	I don't think so, I don't usually trust influencers	No, I don't buy just from ads, but I might look into the brand.	I enjoy content from shelters and genuine pet owners.	I trust real reviews, photos, videos and written testimonials the most.	I trust user content more than advertising, because I think it's more honest.	Honest, detailed reviews would help most.	UGC influences me more for toys and accessories than food.	No, it's not something I usually do.

					because they usually benefit from promoting the products							
<b>Rodrigo</b>	Yes, I use TikTok and Instagram.	Absolutely, a lot.	Yes, I follow "Gato Miu".	No.	Not a product, but I was inspired to build him a patio.	No.	I enjoy funny cat videos most.	I trust videos showing real product use.	I trust people more than ads, even if I haven't bought from them.	Showing happy pets and real benefits makes content more trustworthy.	It doesn't influence me much, but it gives me ideas.	No.
<b>Sérgio</b>	Yes, I use Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp.	Yes, especially at first, I used to look up pet-related content to figure out what to buy. Now, it's mostly for fun, but I still enjoy pet content.	Yes, I follow "Cocker Spaniel Português" and similar accounts.	Yes, the dog food was recommended by a pet nutritionist on social media, and I still use that brand today.	No, that never happened.	In the past, yes, now I'm more careful. However, I did buy a special scarf for his ears.	I enjoy entertaining and educational photos and videos.	I trust organic posts and comments but always verify with product info.	I trust user content more than ads but I still verify facts.	Clear info on price-quality would make posts more useful.	It affects me less now, only trusted brands and good deals have an impact.	Yes, I've shared opinions about our kibble and groomer to support them.

<b>Tatiana</b>	Yes, I use Facebook and Instagram.	Yes, but moderately.	Yes, I follow some cat-related groups, such as "Gatos Urbanos" and "IRA".	No.	No.	Only when I see kibble on sale.	I like to see posts from the rescue associations I follow, and informative content.	I trust helpful, informative content the most.	UGC, because it feels more honest.	Very little, I'm not easily influenced by it.	If credible groups share helpful advice, I consider it.	No, but I usually share posts about lost animals or fundraising campaigns.
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## Appendix 6

42 - Additional Insights	
<b>Amanda</b>	I had an Instagram page for Caju to save funny memories, but I barely post now.
<b>Ana</b>	As a vet, I'm sceptical of hype, unscientific claims, and misleading advertising, particularly for people who lack the knowledge to realise they are being wrongly influenced.
<b>Carlos</b>	Even though I'm not easily influenced, sometimes I'm influenced by online research and store visits. My dog is part of the family and offers emotional support. If one day he's gone, I'll miss him terribly.
<b>Carolina</b>	I buy what she needs without going overboard, she's happy with little.
<b>Diana</b>	With Benny's allergies, I'm much more cautious than I was with my previous dog. I also care a lot about animal rights, and wish Portugal's culture around that would improve.
<b>Fernanda</b>	No, not really.
<b>Gabriela</b>	I want to volunteer at "Canil de Coimbra" when I have more time.
<b>Helena</b>	I buy food for stray cats. I've plan ahead for my cat's care if I pass away, and I also think elderly people should be allowed pets in care homes.
<b>Inês</b>	Even the best products aren't guaranteed hits with my cats, they can be really picky.
<b>Isabel</b>	No, I think that's all.
<b>João</b>	We have pet meetups with other owners, and I only buy what's useful or enjoyable for my dog.
<b>Mariana</b>	I love animals deeply and used to help with cat rescues. I even cooked for my sick cat and supported "Gatos Urbanos" in Coimbra because I believe in their mission.
<b>Nilza</b>	I believe kids should grow up with pets, it teaches care, affection, and responsibility.

<b>Paulo</b>	I don't think so.
<b>Pedro</b>	No, not really.
<b>Raquel</b>	My dog brings joy and companionship, which makes me want to buy her things.
<b>Rita</b>	They're family, so I give them the best I can. Where I live, it's hard to find specialised pet stores that offer products for pets with special health needs, so buying online helps a lot. Their age also affects what I buy.
<b>Rodrigo</b>	He's like a child to me, so I love spoiling and stimulating him.
<b>Sérgio</b>	I post on Murphy's Instagram like a digital album but don't promote products. I also don't agree with the way pets are commercialised, I believe that all breeder should be registered because many times they don't disclose all the information about the pets and are only worried about profiting, which I feel is very harmful for both the owners and the pets.
<b>Tatiana</b>	I became a foster after seeing a Facebook post. One rescue led to another, and now I have six cats.