

INTERNET

Social media brings accessibility to exclusive luxury

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Instagram image from Proenza Schouler

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MIAMI – Social media is changing the way consumers experience both fashion and art, creating a heightened level of accessibility, according to a panel at The New York Times International Luxury Conference Dec. 2.

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Now, instead of a limited number of people who are attending a show and able to take part in the event, everyone is invited via posts. Beyond an engagement tool, social media also provides opportunities for creation, serving as a source of inspiration or art in itself.

"For us, we're not the biggest Instagram social media users on a personal level, but we're fascinated by it on a creative level," said Lazaro Hernandez, co-designer of **Proenza Schouler**.

"It's really interesting how Instagram and social media has kind of defined the aesthetics of the moment, that all social media has instigated a whole new aesthetic," he said.

"As a fashion designer, we're drawn to what the now is all about."

Mood board

The designers behind fashion label Proenza Schouler placed social media first for their

spring/summer 2013 collection, pulling random imagery from Tumblr and other online platforms that then became the basis for the fabrics used.



Proenza Schouler spring/summer 2013 ad campaign

Social media has altered how fashion is viewed, and the designers played with this concept in another season, manipulating leather to look like tweed, so that the appearance differs in digital or in person.

Mr. Hernandez said that an entire six month's of work is now judged on a screen that is 3 inches by 1 inch.

Also recognizing the shift in the fashion show structure is Dan Porter, head of digital for William Morris Endeavor. Realizing the large amount of content that could be created around a runway show, he and his team worked to go beyond the traditional runway show imagery that shows models walking.

From time lapse captures of the makeup process to stories from backstage, a group of individuals brought consumers into the inner workings of Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in New York via iPhones.

He likens it to sports social media, in which consumers are less interested in the highlights and more interested in behind-the-scenes aspects of the game, such as the players in the tunnel before running onto the field, that they would not have been able to see otherwise.

Proenza Schouler has taken this concept to heart for their runway shows. As a young brand, it realizes it cannot compete with the spectacles put on by Chanel or Louis Vuitton, so it instead focuses on doing something different.



Panel

For them, this means a more intimate approach, using word of mouth to spread awareness.

Artist Brendan Lynch took inspiration from a popular social media "It girl" for one of his art shows. He took items depicted on her Web site and then crafted sculptures out of the fashion and accessories.

Mr. Lynch then created an Instagram account that featured the sculptures, buying followers and comments to give the illusion of popularity, making a statement about how much of social media is surface appearances, and how people look at content differently based on perceived understandings of audience.

Instagrammable moments

The panelists agreed that Instagram is an exciting social media platform, due to the wide range of users and applications. This creates an opportunity for research, allowing brands to get inspiration and better understand their customers.

A lot of Instagram action occurred at the New York Fashion Week this year according to an analysis completed by Curalate, a marketing and digital suite for the visual Web.

With more than 115,000 Instagram images during the week, the event saw much more interaction than February's fashion week ([see story](#)).

Visual platforms in general allow for this information gleaned. For instance, consumers' curation of Pinterest boards can reveal connections between labels that brands may not have been aware of before.

Pinterest is also a way for brands to conduct market research. If Rebecca Minkoff sees that a particular handbag from multiple seasons ago is trending on social media, they might use that information to reintroduce that style or update it ([see story](#)).

While individuals might use social media for bragging, for brands, social is more about inviting consumers in than FOMO.

"I think that people don't necessarily just want to consume, they want to participate," William Morris Endeavor' Mr. Porter said. "And so this idea that social enables you through anything from the comments, to seeing how a product is made to seeing all those other things like that you feel like when you consume that product, you're consuming a larger experience."

Final Take

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