

PRINT

Pace of cultural change must be met with careful observation, sharp reactions

April 21, 2016



Vogue Me broke records with its inaugural campaign

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

SEOUL, South Korea Change is wrought too quickly to anticipate, meaning that brands need to be fast reactors, according to Vogue China's editor in chief at the Cond Nast International Luxury Conference on April 20.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246** ▶

China in particular has changed enormously, both over the long and short term, presenting global brands with challenges and opportunities alike. Marketers must find an organic cultural shift in demand and balance the needs of separate generations to ensure future success.

"I was speaking with [former Lanvin creative director] Alber Elbaz in Beijing recently, and he talked about when facing wind, the smart, people instead of hiding from the wind, would build windmills to leverage the power," said Angelica Cheung, editor in chief of Vogue China. "I added, Yes, that's a good idea, but while we build these windmills we can't lose sight of our own directions."

"While we capture the fast changing youth power, we need to be very mindful of keeping our direction and of the DNA of our brand," she said.

Vogue Me

The millennial generation has a different mindset than their parents and grandparents, with a craving for experience, a distrust of authority and heavy social media use that exposes them to a vastly different group of celebrities and influencers than previous generations. With these differences come different reactions to the brisk pop culture landscape.



Vogue Me promotional image

These changes can present challenges to brands, who must find a way to reach a segment that speaks a different language without sacrificing brand integrity or ignoring current, loyal consumers. To do this, the brand must locate its core values and find a new way to communicate the message without altering it.

To kick-off "Vogue Me," a publication somewhat akin to "Teen Vogue" for China in its reach for a younger audience, the magazine chose to forgo interviews with Chinese media and do the marketing through its own digital and social media channels, where its new audience lives.



Vogue Me cover featuring Lu Han, Kiko Mizuhara and Pyper America Smith

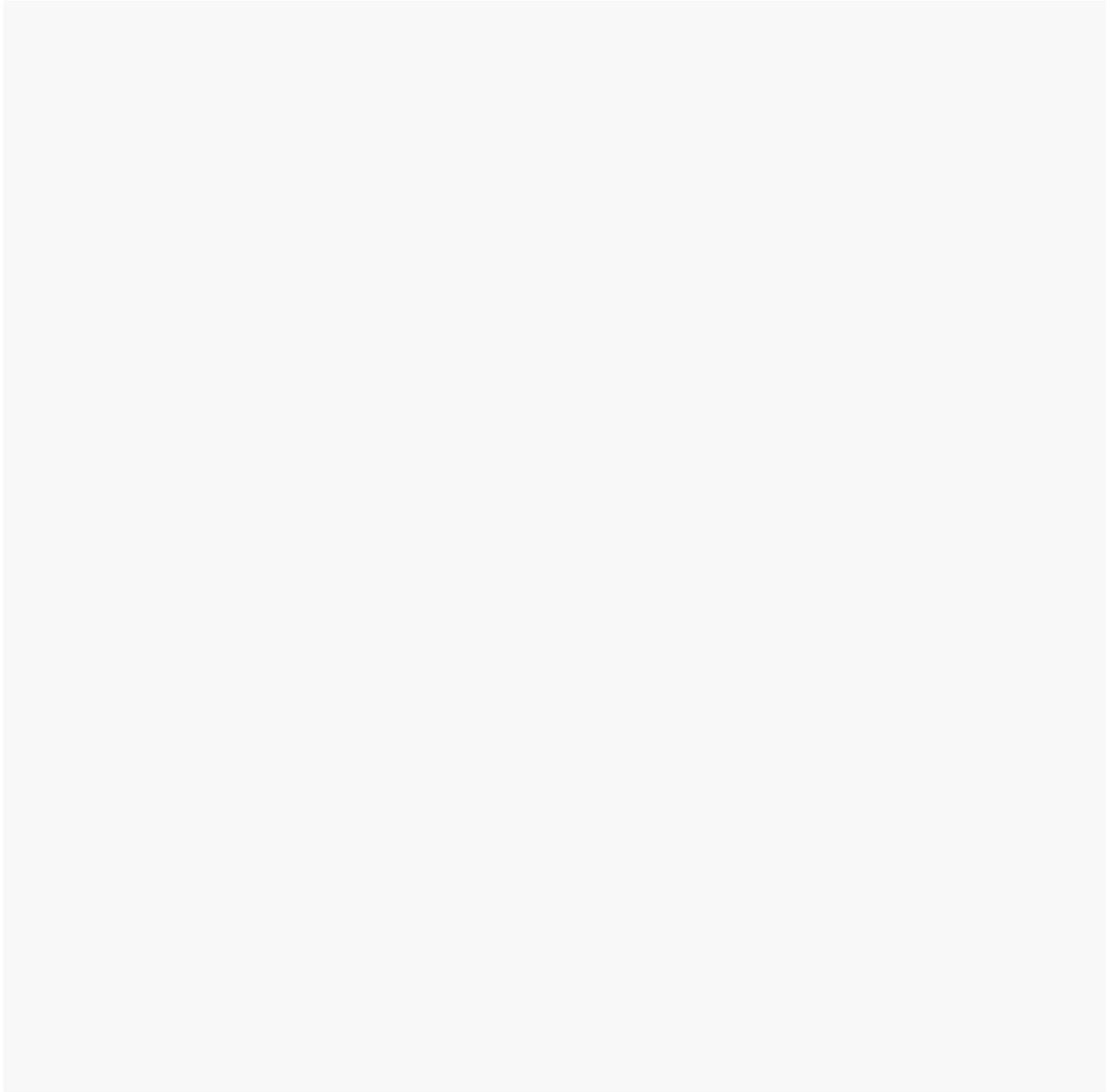
A music video featuring Lu Han, of the popular boy band EXO, got tens of millions of views, while the campaign for the inaugural Vogue Me as a whole reached 400 million consumers on social media within a week. Today, a month after it launched, it has reached 700 million over half of China's population, establishing the brand instantly.

According to Ms. Cheung, Vogue China discussed launching a new magazine for younger consumers several years ago. At the time, Ms. Cheung was steadfastly opposed, citing an insufficient difference between China's teen girls

and its current consumer base.

However, just a few years later, a cultural shift was visibly materializing, a testament to the rapid evolution of culture and fashion in modern China.

Today's teens and young adults in China are the country's first generation to have never experienced poverty. They are from a one-child policy China, well educated, free from student loans, have well-paid jobs in a booming economy and are spoiled and doted on by parents and grandparents, who give the children what they themselves could not have in their more turbulent youth.



Teaser for MV produced for Lu Han's "Adventure Time" single by #vogueme @voguechina shot by @boo_george_studio #luhan # #voguefilms

A video posted by Angelica Cheung (@angelica_cheung) on Mar 20, 2016 at 8:35am PDT

As an experiment, Vogue China's July issue featured Kris Wu, also a member of EXO, and Kendall Jenner on its cover. The record-breaking success of the issue brought Vogue to enthusiastic younger readers, while the older, long-time readers aired grievances about feeling abandoned.

Ms. Cheung notes that fashion as a whole is growing younger, but the long-time Vogue readers would need to be eased into this shift gradually. By contrast, the teens and 20-somethings would want a more radical break, necessitating the establishment of "Vogue Me."

Vogue Me is named after China's so-called "Me Generation," which has asserted individuality where its parents and grandparents comprised a collective. The sharp contrast in values and the size of each market meant that, despite declining to publish one in prior years, Vogue would need a new publication.

The key to the brand extension is to communicate the same values but in a new way. Vogue is about style and sophistication, and while its loyal readers of the past decade may accept Vogue's authority on it, younger readers will not. Rather than selling the Me Generation on the idea that "Vogue says so, so it is," Vogue Me will showcase the influencers and contemporaries to whom the market segment will respond.



Kiko Mizuhara Vogue Me

"Playing authority is not going to work," Ms. Cheung said. "We need to be their friends and treat them as equal and make sure their voices are heard in our platforms."

"And more important, we need to understand who they are influenced by," she said.

The "Me" Generation

In addition to reaching Chinese consumers at home, retail outlets must be prepared to service those consumers abroad.

Chinese residents will make 90 million outbound trips in 2020, with that number increasing by an additional 36 million over the following decade, according to a report by Euromonitor.

As reported in "[How to Target Chinese Shoppers Abroad](#)," outbound trips have increased on average by an impressive 13 percent since 2000, helping China overtake Japan as the second largest consumer market in 2011. With the significance and size of the Chinese tourist market only projected to swell, brands will need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the market in order to reach consumers ([see story](#)).

The changes in the youth market in China are echoed elsewhere, as brands across all sectors are regularly tinkering with products or rebranding themselves in an effort to appeal to the new consumer.

In the automotive industry, British automaker Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is showing its dark side to attract risk takers and self-empowered, self-confident youth.

"Black Badge," a darker, more confident and more powerful Rolls-Royce, will take shape in a permanent Bespoke series targeting goal-oriented and self-made young affluents. The new series is a significant makeover for Rolls-Royce, but is being implemented in response to a changing consumer base and habits ([see story](#)).

"If you truly understand your brand's DNA and the right thing to do, you will see the way to communicate the message doesn't change the message itself," Ms. Cheung said.

"I can understand the mixed feelings many of you have about China," she said. "It's a huge market but also a confusing market with so many geopolitical and cultural variations that can shift monthly, even weekly and daily, due to pop culture.

"I think a lot of you are trying to catch up on what's going on in China everyday, the pop culture. We are here to help as much as we can."

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.