

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Kenzo translates social media to reality in humorous film

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Campaign image from Kenzo's "The Realest Real"

By SARAH JONES

French fashion house Kenzo is reflecting on the boundaries and connections created by social media in a campaign that favors content over commerce.

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The brand tapped indie filmmaker Carrie Brownstein to direct a video featuring its fall/winter 2016 collection, the result of which is a star-studded take on the relationships developed between celebrities and their fans online. With a relatable theme and an outlandish narrative, Kenzo's social video may find an audience outside of its own followers.

"Collaborating with established and avant guard artists is nothing new for Kenzo or for luxury marketers," said Marko Muellner, senior vice president digital at [Edelman](#), Portland. "This approach is great for connecting with younger, niche audiences who value assisted discovery of the new, cool and esoteric.

"In many ways, The Realest Real is meta-commentary art-advertising," he said. "The most literal interpretation sees Carrie Brownstein's film as a disdainful view of our omnipresent, curated digital lives and the shallowness of fandom - both of celebrities and in social media.

"But Carrie is too smart for that basic reading. Oh, the layers of real. At its real core, this is an ad for clothes, a commercial endeavor meant to pique our vanity, compel us to stop our incessant finger swiping and tilt our phone, turn-up the volume and give our golden attention to the Brownstein/Kenzo art.

"To compel us to attend her ensemble's journey and to contemplate a like, comment or share, Brownstein, in her unique way, uses the slightly familiar faces of now to draw us in. But it's not the usual Bella or Gigi Hadid faces we're used to, it's the slightly unexpected 'unmodels' that, in this case, add another layer of real."

Mr. Muellner is not affiliated with [Kenzo](#), but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

[Kenzo](#) was unable to comment directly before press deadline.

Fan club

"The Realest Real" premiered on Kenzo's social channels and Web site on Sept. 13. The six-minute film opens in a stark room where the viewer sees Abby, played by Laura Harrier, awaiting an appointment as a group of stoic people watch her.



The cast of Kenzo's 'The Realest Real'

Abby is greeted by an employee, who tells her to come with her. As they set off down a hallway, the group of people walk behind, and the employee explains to Abby that they are her followers.

They finally reach a door labeled "Mom," and Abby is ushered inside. Once seated at a large conference table, she meets the minister of public private relations at the Institute of the Real and the Really Real, played by Mahershala Ali. Based on her "application," which consists of all of her comments, emails and texts, Abby has been chosen. Pulling a piece of paper off a gigantic stack, the minister recites Abby's comment on a post from actress Natasha Lyonne, in which she referred to the "Orange is the New Black" star as "Mom."

Abby is given the chance to have Ms. Lyonne be her actual mother, and she accepts. What seems great inside the institute turns sour once back in the real world, as Ms. Lyonne begins to annoy, embarrass and smother Abby.

After her original mom and her Natasha mom meet for the first time and get in an argument, Abby has to confront which is her real mom.

Kenzo "The Realest Real", a movie by Carrie Brownstein

"I get the sense that Kenzo thought of this effort very traditionally," Mr. Muellner said. "Let an artist create some art and simply promote it on owned channels.

"With all of the layers of meaning brought by Brownstein, Kenzo missed the opportunity to add their own," he said. "Instead of playing with social as a medium, teasing out our culture of likes and flippant commentary in the marketing tactics themselves, they posted and moved on.

"While short video is the currency of social media -- see, more layers -- Kenzo didn't weave the stories for the platforms or their audiences specifically nor did they attempt to capitalize on the power of the channels to drive amplification or product discovery. Did Kenzo themselves believe too much in star power and fandom?"

Telling stories

Kenzo's strategy for its recent campaigns has centered on narrative films.

The label shared homemade cake among the residents of California's Slab City for its spring/summer 2016 collection film.

Directed by Sean Baker, "Snowbird" was filmed entirely with an iPhone and traced the journey of Theo, played by model Abbey Lee, as she traversed through the "debris-scattered [Sonoran] desert community" of Slab City, CA, known for its eccentricity and off-the-grid living. While other fashion houses are moving toward more abstract campaign films, Kenzo's Snowbird focuses on the narrative and "eschews the glitz and glamour of fashion" ([see story](#)).

Kenzo also looked back on 1990s teen culture for its fall/winter 2015 campaign that centered on a commissioned short film from director Gregg Araki.

"Here Now" visited a "teenage wasteland" in southern California filled with angst, romance and rebellion, using

Kenzo's collection as costumes that help to differentiate the different characters. Kenzo wanted this campaign to go beyond clothing advertising, therefore incorporating apparel as a narrative device enables the commercial aspect of the film to be more subdued ([see story](#)).

"Kenzo has considerable brand loyalty and has earned sizable social media communities, so posting the trailers and the full length film to their Web site and social channels drives significant awareness and engagement," Mr. Muellner said. "But missed opportunities abound.

"From using the power of rich media on current platforms like Facebook Canvas Ads and Instagram Stories to the art and science of paid advertising and targeting to considering how Snapchat and live streaming might have brought the campaign depth," he said. "And lastly, integrating product stories more into the marketing tactics, if done with aplomb, could have stitched the campaign together quite nicely."

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