

LUXURY MEMO

## Luxury brands leverage custom emojis for peer-to-peer communication push

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*Image embellished with Anya Hindmarch sticker*

By SARAH JONES

Looking to become part of consumers' conversations, an increasing number of luxury brands are rolling out label-specific emojis.

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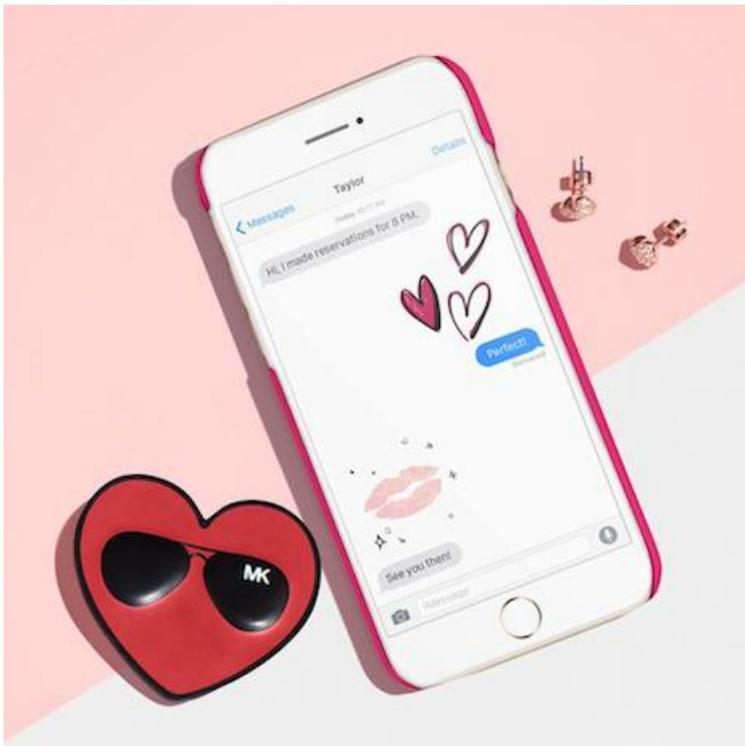
As Valentine's Day approaches, brands including Michael Kors and Mot & Chandon are tapping the engagement possibilities of peer-to-peer communication, helping consumers share their affection for friends, family and romantic partners with holiday-specific messaging graphics. While emojis offer a chance for an aspirational audience and existing clients to spread their love for a particular brand, how effective is this mobile marketing tactic for luxury labels?

"Branded emojis are a simple yet powerful way for brands to connect to their consumers, especially millennials and Gen Zs," said Christian Brucculeri, CEO of **Snaps**.

"Even though luxury brands have a typically smaller audience, branded emojis showcase the brand's unique voice and overall creativity," he said. "Emojis also show consumers that the brand knows how to connect with and speak the language of their evangelists."

In conversation

Michael Kors launched its first emoji keyboard in honor of Valentine's Day. Developed with Snaps, the emojis integrate with the messaging application on both Android and Apple devices, enabling consumers to include the images and GIFs in their texts.



*Michael Kors' branded emojis*

Playing into the holiday's theme, the selection of emojis includes kissing lips and conversation hearts, as well as cartoon versions of the brand's accessories.

Also making a push for the holiday is Mot & Chandon. A pink Emoji Bottle of the brand's Ros Imperial comes with emoji stickers that can be used to personalize the matching pink packaging.

Taking the concept to mobile, Mot & Chandon also created a branded keyboard app, which includes mini animated Mot & Chandon bottles with popping corks, lips, hearts, a hot air balloon and a carrier pigeon dropping off Valentine's Day notes, among others ([see story](#)).



*Mot & Chandon's emoji stickers in action*

Last year, Versace took Valentine's Day as an opportunity to launch its emoji app. Rather than connecting to SMS, Versace's app passes the creative baton to the user, allowing them to combine existing photos, backgrounds, stickers, drawings and text to create a photo shareable on Instagram ([see story](#)).

"Focus leads to success. At least in the beginning stages, focusing on a single topic or event can lead to the best execution and user experience," Markella Haynes, social media community manager at [MDG Advertising](#). "Brands have the right idea to release emojis around Valentine's Day, because it gives users a creative way to tell their loved ones how they feel through a simple text message.

"If the keyboards aren't released around a special event, there's no real reason to download the app," she said. "The best course of action would be to release Valentine's Day-themed emojis, but then update their app for other holidays or more general conversations. The more use a consumer finds in a brand's keyboard, the longer it will stick around."

Outside of Valentine's Day, recent months have seen labels translating physical designs into conversation pieces.

Anya Hindmarch took her leather stickers, which include cartoonish eyes and sayings, and created her own keyboard ([see story](#)).

Event-specific keyboards have also been popular. Kenzo, for instance, touted its collaboration with H&M by digging into its brand codes in a keyboard.



### *Kenzo's emojis*

Bloomingdale's likewise used its Bloomoticons app to draw attention to its 100 Percent campaign of exclusive merchandise ([see story](#)).

Even those without a specific product to sell have looked to emojis to further develop a personality and community feeling. Harper's Bazaar's emojis speak to the magazine's reader base, offering images of everything from avocado to Champagne flutes and high heeled pumps.

"In 2016, users downloaded Snaps' iMessage sticker packs 108 million times and branded keyboards 478 million times," Mr. Brucculeri said. "We saw 17 million iMessage stickers shared and 97 million emojis shared."

"The most important thing we learned while building emojis is that content is king," he said. "Give the audience what they're craving: audio, gifs and more.

"We also learned that timing really is everything , and the importance of capitalizing on correlating holidays, news, current events and new product launches. Finally, we observed that emotions depicting love and happiness outperform all other shared content."

#### Target audience

For luxury brands, whose customer base tends to be more mature, this may be engaging the aspirational rather than the active purchasers.

Despite the meteoric rise in the use of emojis in marketing campaigns over the past year, marketers may be too focused on younger consumers and missing an opportunity to reach 25-44 years old with the symbols, according to a report from Appboy.

While 43 percent of consumers 25-44 years old think it is fun when brands use emojis in messages - the highest of any age group - 39 percent report that they have never received a message with emojis from a brand, also the highest of any age group. The use of emojis by brands in campaigns has consistently grown month-over-month since last fall and has skyrocketed 609 percent from a year ago, with 2,680 June campaigns including the icons, according to a new report from Appboy ([see story](#)).

If your keyboard is truly something worth sharing, the target audience won't be limited," Ms. Haynes said.

"The best part of creating a keyboard is that the emojis get shared directly with friends, and if friends like what they see, they'll be inclined to ask what app was used to create those images and download it themselves," she said.

"You'd potentially see widespread downloads because of the use consumers get out of your sticker set.

"Emojis are a personal thing. They allow users to connect and emote in a way that simply isn't reflected in a written text message.

"Luxury brands are looking for depth of engagement. If these keyboards are used on a daily basis as part of a user's lexicon, then these emojis represent them and therefore so does the brand. If luxury brands can become a method of communication and not just a topic of conversation, then that's the next level of personalized marketing."