

MARKETING

## How much does casting differentiation count in advertising?

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Image from Moschino's spring/summer 2017 ad campaign. Image credit: Moschino

By SARAH JONES

A bevy of luxury marketers has embraced a new class of supermodel, linking with famous faces that have become household names in fashion for the social media generation.

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In an effort to align themselves with the most well-known talent of today, a number of brands find themselves sharing spokesmodels with their competitors who appear alongside them in magazines and on consumers' news feeds. While these celebrity models bring a level of awareness to luxury labels, is their ubiquity proving more helpful or harmful for brand building?

"The new version of supermodels today are so much more than their predecessors because the models themselves are brands in their own right with legions of followers that pay attention to their every move on social media and beyond," said Daymon Bruck, CCO and partner at [The O Group](#), Seattle.

"They are more than just models for the luxury brands they represent," he said. "They are target audience influencer that have the marketing power to turn heads on every platform, not just inside fashion publications."

### Supermodel saturation

Even though the proliferation of supermodels is not a new concept, the channels brands have to promote these partnerships are more plentiful. Models themselves also have platforms to speak directly to fans, creating a heightened level of notoriety even outside of the fashion community.

Propelled by the celebrity of their reality show families, Kendall Jenner and Gigi and Bella Hadid have become omnipresent in luxury marketing.

The Hadid sisters have co-starred in campaigns for Fendi and Moschino, while also securing individual contracts. Gigi Hadid counts partnerships with brands including Stuart Weitzman, Max Mara, Versace, Tom Ford and Missoni, while her younger sister has appeared in ads for Giuseppe Zanotti and also serves as an ambassador for Tag Heuer, Bulgari accessories and Dior Beauty.



*Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid for Fendi's fall/winter 2017 campaign. Image credit: Fendi*

Beyond appearing in front of the camera, Gigi Hadid was also tapped as the photographer of Versus Versace's spring/summer 2017 campaign. The uncensored ads capture the model's boyfriend, singer Zayn Malik, along with model Adwoa Aboah ([see story](#)).

Ms. Jenner, who first became a known entity as part of the central family on "Keeping Up With the Kardashians," has since launched a modeling career that includes work posing for Fendi and La Perla, as well as acting as a frequent face for Este Lauder.

Along with notoriety, brands have been candid about casting these models due to their social media presence. While all three boast millions of social followers, Ms. Jenner tops the rankings with 83 million fans on Instagram as of press time.

"There is a resurgence of what was happening in the '90s from a supermodel point of view, except today's supermodel come with the power of social and influence in today's terms," said Rony Zeidan, president and creative director at [RONY](#), New York.

"Gigi, Bella and Kendall are the Cindy, Christy and Naomi of their times," he said. "This new generation of power girls can help move the needle on the businesses they front their faces with."

Beyond these personalities, other new generation supermodels such as Cara Delevingne, Joan Smalls, Liu Wen, Natalia Vodianova have in recent years booked multiple luxury campaigns for the same season.



*Cara Delevingne was one of the faces of Chanel's Gabrielle handbag. Image credit: Chanel*

Particularly for smaller labels, one of these familiar faces can help propel their brand recognition, especially as campaign faces share the finished product on social media. However, with more brands taking up this tactic, this is becoming a crowded field.

When flipping through fashion magazines or scrolling through social media, the overlap in casting could make it more difficult for consumers to differentiate one brand from another.

"The smartest luxury brands go out of the way to make sure that the models they cast embody their brand in spirit as much as look," Mr. Bruck said.

"When looking at brand awareness and brand building it's more important to stay true to brand strategy and personality than to look different for looks sake," he said. "If the brand strategy is unique in a measurable way, all the visual choices that follow should support and grow the brand with every piece of communication.

"When considering who to cast as the face of your brand, we would make sure a model/celebrity had a matching brand ethos to our client's. What does their personal brand stand for, who follows them, can their brand help or potentially damage our clients brand by association?

"It's so much more today than just finding the right look or person, because celebrities are brands and what happens now is closer to co-branded messaging than a traditional endorsement or face that represents a luxury brand."

#### Casting trends

Models and athletes are popular choices for brands seeking a famous spokesmodel, with individuals in these two professions dominating rankings of the top 20 celebrity endorsers.

In a list compiled by Celebrity Intelligence, the celebrity with the highest volume of deals this past year was model Hailey Baldwin, the daughter of actor Stephen Baldwin. Increasingly, brands are seeking out social media talent over traditional celebrity, but notoriety is still a decision maker when picking a campaign face ([see story](#)).

Along with marketers of hard luxury goods, the social media celebrity of these models has been tapped for other projects.

For instance, Cond Nast-owned Vogue magazine is leveraging virtual reality technology to give consumers an immersive tour of some of the fashion industry's most coveted wardrobes.

Together with Google's Daydream virtual reality platform, Cond Nast Entertainment and Vogue are sneaking a peek into a handful of supermodels' closets in 360-degree films. Publications, including Vogue, are increasingly leveraging digital media to provide content that extends their brands further than the page ([see story](#)).

"I tend to veer towards booking models that have a long lasting impression and a unique point of view that is synonymous with the brand's DNA," Mr. Zeidan said. "In my opinion the brands should lead the conversation with a model that acts as the muse or the driver to deliver the brand message, instead of having the model be the primary message about herself followed by the brand in second place.

"With models that are so big and influential with a following of girls that are obsessed with their individual style and aesthetic, it is challenging for a brand to reveal its true look and be the star in the image," he said. "It becomes about the girls themselves, and if you are booking a Gigi or Kendall you want the audience to recognize them immediately, and not necessarily have to spend a few seconds to see if it's Gigi or Kendall indeed.

"The transformation approach that luxury brands used to evoke in fashion imagery not that it doesn't happen anymore is becoming less ubiquitous, but with brands that are able to drive the style conversation, there is no need for a supermodel caliber of today's talent to push the awareness."