

MARKETING

How luxury brands can engage Chinese consumers for Qixi

August 14, 2018



Four Seasons Hotel Pudong, Shanghai is among the brands launching special offers for Qixi. Image courtesy of Four Seasons

By SARAH JONES

As Chinese Valentine's Day approaches, luxury brands are feeling the love with gifting and experiential offers.

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

The Qixi Festival, celebrated this year on Aug. 17, is based on a tragic tale of forbidden love. While originally a day marked by preparing and hoping for future marital bliss, Qixi has now also become a shopping holiday.

"Qixi is an ideal gift-giving time for Chinese customers," said Renee Hartmann, cofounder of [China Luxury Advisors](#), Los Angeles. "Limited-edition products from luxury brands are very appealing, as are Qixi-themed gifts.

"Gifting during the Qixi holiday tends to be focused on more high-end gift items, rather than tokens of love items such as chocolates," she said.

Love affair

Qixi dates back about 2,000 years to the Han Dynasty. The festival celebrates the tale of "The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl."

The myth centers on the titular characters, two star-crossed lovers whose union is forbidden since the cowherd is human and the weaver is a goddess. To prevent them from being together, they are sent to live on opposite sides of a river, which represents the Milky Way.

Every year on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, the lovers are reunited, as a flock of magpies creates a bridge over the river to allow them to cross the stream.

Traditionally, the day was celebrated with girls asking the weaving goddess for domestic skills and a good husband.

Due to the romantic nature of the story it is based on, today celebrations for Qixi often center on gestures between significant others. There are also events designed to help individuals find a mate, such as group blind dates or matchmaking experiences.

"For brands seeking to attract customers during the Qixi holiday, deals are always great attention grabbers for Chinese shoppers," Ms. Hartmann said. "We also see many retailers conduct fun games such as kissing contests to

win prizes."

Similarly to Western Valentine's Day, gifts such as chocolates and flowers are popular choices. But for affluent Chinese, luxury jewelry and accessories are also sought-after presents.

According to L2, a number of luxury brands have embraced ecommerce-centric retail to celebrate Qixi in recent years.

For instance, after seeing consumers' increased interest in its products around Chinese Valentine's Day, Loewe chose the event as the basis for its first ecommerce venture in the nation. Ahead of the holiday last year, the brand marketed a limited-edition version of its Barcelona handbag decked out in hearts to Tmall shoppers ([see story](#)).



Loewe's handbag for Qixi 2017. Image credit: Alibaba

Furthering the digital focus, brands including Dior and Chlo worked with key opinion leaders such as Angelababy and Mr. Bags to promote limited-edition items on WeChat in 2017.

This year, the focus on ecommerce is continuing.

British fashion label Mulberry launched on Chinese ecommerce platform Secoo in time for Chinese Valentine's Day.

In honor of the holiday, the brand has created a limited-edition Amberley handbag, for which Secoo will be the exclusive ecommerce partner. Made in red leather, the bag's flap includes quilting in the shape of concentric hearts ([see story](#)).

Michael Kors teamed up with ambassador Yang Mi to co-design a special version of its Whitney bag for Qixi. The red shoulder bag is studded with stars and hearts.

Michael Kors x Yang Mi for Qixi 2018

The brand recently launched a full store on WeChat, making an investment in Chinese ecommerce ([see story](#)).

According to [Jing Daily](#), Burberry chose Qixi to launch its first mini program on WeChat. The mobile feature asks users to take a quiz with their significant other.

Completing the questionnaire allows users to view Burberry's latest designs, which include two handbags made exclusively for Qixi.

"The obvious aspect is gifting, and in China this is made seamless thanks to WeChat," said Vanessa Wu, director at [Reuter Communications](#), Shanghai. "In China, consumers don't look at Web sites. WeChat and its mini-program capabilities are your China Web site.

"This means that you can promote ads on users' WeChat Moments feed which click-through to your campaign, such as interactive games, short videos and more," she said. "This is also a good spot for gifting. In WeChat you can seamlessly buy gift cards for your contacts and send it directly to their WeChat.

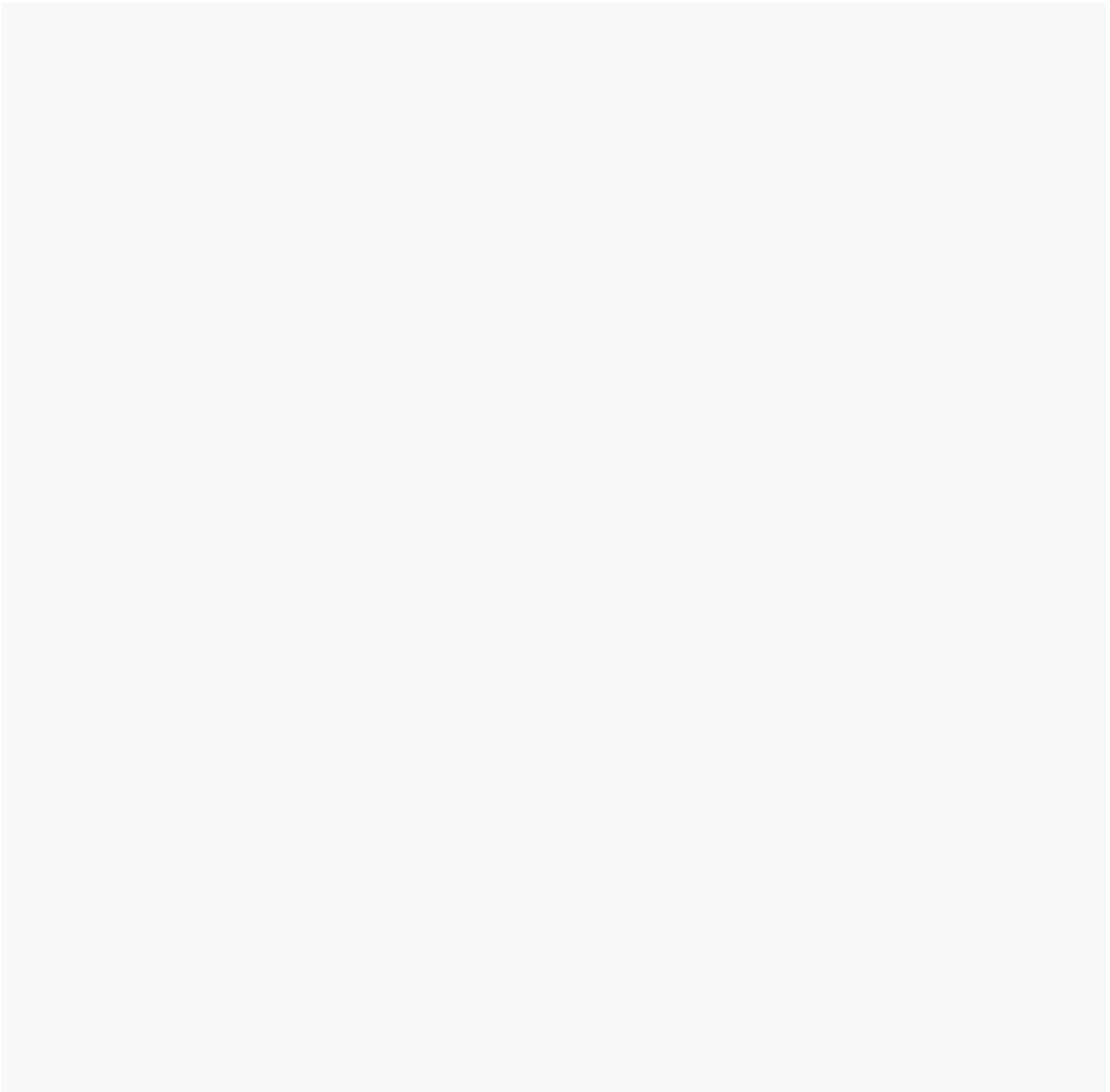
"It's clear that gamification is popular in China for all ages. For example, Pierre Marcolini, the famous Belgian chocolatier, created a game-based WeChat feature which went viral organically. Brands can think outside the box in order to stand out."

Offline, Dior is also embracing the holiday through a partnership with Holt Renfrew. The label is hosting a pop-up at the retailer's Yorkdale location in Toronto, and the brand is also selling the capsule collection at Holt Renfrew in

Vancouver.

Per *Women's Wear Daily*, the collection includes ready-to-wear, jewelry and handbags featuring heart motifs and phrases such as "Open your heart."

The pop-up opened Aug. 4, and will run through Aug. 20. Dior Amour is also retailing in China to align with Qixi.



August 4 to 20! Discover the @Dior Amour Pop Up and shop a coveted capsule collection to fall for, available exclusively at Holt Renfrew Yorkdale.

A post shared by Holt Renfrew (@holtrenfrew) on Aug 4, 2018 at 12:15pm PDT

Instagram post from Holt Renfrew

Beyond products, luxury brands are seeking to engage Chinese consumers through experiences.

For instance, Four Seasons Hotel Pudong, Shanghai is offering a package that includes 999 roses, Champagne and a chef's table-style in-room meal. The experience also gives guests two hours of private pool usage and customized robes.

For foodies, the hotel has created a love-themed menu at its in-house restaurant Shng X.

"The opportunity exists for brands to show that they understand Chinese culture," Ms. Wu said. "It's an opportunity for brands to understand the original story about where the festival came from and weave their own story related to it.

"Being about love, the general theme might seem quite obvious. But there are vast differences of the ideas around love between Chinese and other cultures worldwide, especially related to traditional Western marketing," she said.

"Brands need to take these differences into account and make sure that they don't simply believe that 'sex sells' everywhere, but that the Chinese notions of love are much more nuanced and culturally specific.

"For ever more sophisticated Chinese consumers, luxury brands need to think about the 'money can't buy' experiences that they can offer to couples, more specificity via mobile means to millennial couples. It's important to know that almost all brands of all categories will be promoting a Qixi special campaign, and the need to stand out is greater than ever before."

Catering to China

Boosted by a rebound in China, the global luxury market is projected to grow between 6 to 8 percent this year, according to Bain.

The researcher's "Luxury Study 2018 Spring Update," presented in partnership with Altagamma, found that China will account for much of luxury's growth this year, with sales in the market expected to rise between 20 and 22 percent. Due to the younger demographics of Chinese luxury buyers, these shoppers are pushing many of the business' millennial-centric trends such as streetwear and digitization ([see story](#)).

One millennial trend that extends to China is the tendency for women to buy for themselves. Contrary to traditional marketing that positions jewelry as a gifting item, millennial women are more apt to buy pieces for themselves than to receive them from others.

A new report from MVI Research found that more than half of millennial age women indicate themselves as the primary buyer of jewelry in their households. Luxury marketers have begun to evolve their messaging surrounding jewelry, but as millennials become a bigger consumer base for high-end goods, it will become even more important to appeal to women themselves ([see story](#)).

"Women and girls in China are becoming more independent and are increasingly buying themselves gifts, rather than just relying on men to buy gifts for them," Ms. Hartmann said. "Independence is a key message for both women and men alike in China today."