

MARKETING

## Luxury brands pig out for Chinese New Year

January 30, 2019



Gucci's Chinese New Year campaign. Image courtesy of Gucci, The Three Little Pigs, copyright Disney

By SARAH JONES

As Lunar New Year approaches, luxury labels are leaning in to the Chinese zodiac with products and marketing starring pigs.

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Looking to help Chinese consumers enter the new year with a lucky symbol, everything from watches to handbags have been embellished with swine characters. Chinese New Year, which falls on Feb. 5 this year, is an increasingly global holiday as travelers venture abroad and Chinese immigrants celebrate at home.

"In China, spend across the week-long festival grew by 10 percent year-on-year in 2018 to \$140 billion," said Jonathan Smith, CEO of China marketing specialists **Hot Pot**. "It has also become a very popular time for Chinese consumers to travel, so the opportunity is massive for luxury brands both in-market and on home soil.

"Continual advancement in China's digital ecosystem and consumer demand for authentic brand experiences has opened up the market for Western brands to make an impact when entering the market," he said.

"Capitalizing on the opportunity takes careful strategic and creative planning as many well-established brands such as Burberry can still get it extremely wrong. Lunar New Year marks an important opportunity for luxury brands to take a meaningful step towards their target consumers, demonstrate an understanding of their tastes and if done well, build a lasting and meaningful relationship."

Gettin' piggy with it

The Chinese zodiac originated 2,000 years ago during the Qin dynasty. Each birth year is assigned an animal, which is intended to portray the characteristics of those who were born under the sign.

Pigs are thought to represent abundance and fortune, as well as compassion and generosity.

There is significant retail interest from Chinese consumers for zodiac-themed merchandise. Dealmoon, a site that connects Chinese-American buyers with luxury deals, has noticed an uptick in the number of brands creating zodiac-themed merchandise this year, as brands look to meet this demand.

Longchamp is renewing its relationship with Tao Liang, or Mr. Bags, for Chinese New Year. After partnering with the KOL last year for the holiday, the brand is again tapping into his influence to push a pig-themed capsule.

Mr. Liang designed handbags and leather goods with outline details that reference a pig's ears or curly tail. The influencer also made appearances at Longchamp stores around the globe to help launch the line.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

For the second consecutive year, Longchamp is joining forces with the famous blogger @mrbagss  
#MrBagsXLongchamp #PiggyBag #CNY #YearOfThePig

A post shared by @ longchamp on Jan 8, 2019 at 6:23am PST

### *Instagram post from Longchamp*

Moschino took a similarly whimsical approach to the Year of the Pig. Drawing on the brand's playful attitude, Moschino's Chinese New Year capsule stars Looney Tunes' Porky Pig and Petunia Pig.



*Moschino's capsule for Chinese New Year. Image credit: Moschino*

Gucci also looked to classic cartoons for its Chinese New Year collection. Characters from Disney's 1933 cartoon "Three Little Pigs" are featured on watches, sneakers, backpacks and apparel.

In addition to the existing characters, Gucci made up its own protagonists. Among the inspirations for the brand was the expression "pigs might fly."

To promote the collection, Gucci's store windows have been outfitted in the color red and pig motifs. The brand also tapped photographer Frank Lebon to shoot an editorial campaign in New York, showing locals leading glamorous lives in the company of pet pigs.

Stella McCartney made up its own pig cartoon, placing a superhero version of the animal on a children's T-shirt.

Jaquet Droz opted for a more realistic boar, using miniature hand painting to illustrate lifelike young pigs on watch faces. In the scenes, the animals are standing in fields of wheat.



*Jaquet Droz's watches for Chinese New Year. Image credit: Jaquet Droz*

Lladr invited consumers to celebrate the new year with a pig figurine. In addition to pigs, the brand suggested shoppers pick out a porcelain piece relating to the zodiac for their birth year.

In a playful push, Baccarat created a film in which crystal pigs emerge from gift boxes to party.

Tod's also brought a product to life, showing a pig charm as it escapes from a Gommino bag and flies away.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Tod's distinctive dots decorating the white #GomminoBag, part of the exclusive capsule collection dedicated to Chinese New Year. More via link in bio. #ChineseNewYear #GomminoBag #LunarNewYear

A post shared by Tod's (@tods) on Jan 28, 2019 at 2:01am PST

*Instagram post from Tod's*

Marc Jacobs similarly took the idiom "when pigs fly" literally, creating a charm that depicts a pig with wings and heart-shaped sunglasses.

Some brands opted to create collections that referenced traditional Chinese symbols of luck, such as the color red.

For instance, Ferragamo opted to use a pig for marketing rather than product design. A live pig features in the brand's New Year's push, as it models a scarf or investigates a sneaker.

Diane von Furstenberg similarly shot models cradling small pigs, while Brioni animated a pig alongside its products.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

In celebration of the Year of the Pig, we're pleased to release a limited-edition collection dedicated to the Lunar Chinese calendar's New Year. The perfect look for your new year celebrations, hand selected with the help of a few friends

### *Instagram post from DVF*

Even with the swine saturation, other luxury brands opted out of the zodiac.

For instance, Michael Kors instead chose to focus on the global celebration. In a stop-motion film from Virgilio Villoresi, viewers travel from Paris to New York before reaching Shanghai.

### *Michael Kors' Chinese New Year campaign*

Meanwhile, British fashion house Burberry is painting portraits of family togetherness in its marketing push for Chinese New Year.

The brand's Lunar New Year campaign features a series of shots featuring multigenerational models. While Burberry has previously marketed gift ideas for the holiday, this marks the brand's first advertising effort around Chinese New Year ([see story](#)).

"We see this every year with the zodiac sign featuring heavily," Hot Pot's Mr. Smith said. "Brands will embrace the pig and traditional New Year imagery because in the absence of deeper creative and strategic inspiration, it's the easiest and 'safest' thing to do. It's also a trap.

"Sadly, standard marketing logic and robust strategy are all too often to be left at home around the Lunar New Year, and these campaigns offer little or no relevance or significance to today's modern consumer," he said. "You wouldn't buy your partner a pair of high-end shoes adorned with Christmas Trees or Santas so why expect intelligent, thoughtful, demanding younger consumers to do this in other markets?"

"A cute pig on a traditional red and gold background may play well with a much older more traditional consumer in a tier three city, but is this truly your target audience? Additionally, as the pig is likely to be employed by large number of brands, marketers should be predicting the trend and planning thoughtful creative to cut through at a time of year when media costs are at a premium."

### Swine time

In addition to products, retailers are also getting in on the festivities.

Duty free retailer DFS is focusing on the Year of the Pig for the Lunar New Year 2019, with a series of promotions, offers and interactive events at a number of its stores.

At select stores around the world, DFS will offer a curated selection of products and personalization options in addition to exclusive items and offers. Immersive experiences offered include fun activities such as a Fortune Catcher claw machine ([see story](#)).

Working with Hot Pot, Selfridges created a WeChat mini program that centers on short films featuring London-based Chinese creatives, including a dancer and a poet.

"Brands consistently get it wrong at Lunar New Year," Mr. Smith said. "You cannot coarsely retrofit Western campaigns and expect them to work in the Chinese market. To be successful you need to move your China creative upstream and involve a China partner at the very start of the process.

"Local insight and impactful strategic direction is crucial," he said. "With China bringing its own unique cultural demands from a mindset and aesthetic point of view, you need to uncover universal trends that have impact in that market."

Mr. Smith also suggests that luxury brands look beyond China's tier one cities to markets such as Chengdu, Wuhan and Nanjing, which often have less access to luxury brands despite an interested audience.

Currently, Chinese consumers are about a third of the luxury market, but Bain expects this to grow to 45 percent by 2025 ([see story](#)).

The United States is becoming a highly coveted travel destination among affluent Chinese consumers, and due to their spending habits the demographic has proven extremely influential, according to a report from YouGov.

Chinese affluent look to purchase luxury goods while traveling abroad, and Chinese consumers spend the most out

of any group while traveling ([see story](#)).

"Luxury brands outside of China need to see the opportunity before them," Mr. Smith said. "Lunar New Year has become a very popular opportunity for Chinese consumers traveling to foreign cities and spending significantly for example, in London's luxury department stores the average spend for a single consumer purchase from Chinese traveling consumers can be as high as 3,000 pounds.

"Brands need to think about how they are reaching these consumers throughout the travel trail and employ targeted strategies to engage at the travel research, and booking phases, as well as via targeted platforms to reach consumers in destination," he said.

"Additionally, brands need to recognize that traveling Chinese consumers are often the ones setting the trends when they return to Mainland China. Winning with this audience is a route to establishing positive brand sentiment with a much larger audience back home and setting the foundations for amplified growth via market entry or cross-border ecommerce.

"With this audience the tired and predictable appropriation of the Lunar Festival stereotypes won't work. Brands need to do something different to stand out."

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