

MARKETING

## Luxury brands lean into love in Qixi pushes

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Michael Kors' Valentine's Day push on Tmall. Image credit: Alibaba

By SARAH JONES

Ahead of Qixi, which is akin to Valentine's Day in China, luxury brands are looking to be top-of-mind as consumers seek to show their love through gifting.

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Labels are leveraging partnerships with digital retailers including Tmall and Secoo to showcase limited-edition merchandise for the holiday, seeking to win gifters with exclusivity. Similarly to Valentine's Day, signs of affection around Qixi have moved beyond candy or flowers to include costlier gifts, providing opportunities for luxury brands.

"Qixi, known as the Chinese Valentine's Day, was a 'commercial renaissance' of a traditional Chinese holiday," said Amie Song, specialist, APAC advisory at [Gartner L2](#). "It is an opportunity of luxury brands because it's one of the key gifting moments when boyfriends and husbands are expected to give gifts such as handbags, shoes, jewelries or premium beauty products to their partners.

"We have observed that in the past few years Qixi was able to drive more buzz on Baidu Index for premium beauty and luxury brands than any other holidays more than Valentine's Day," she said. "Brands have started to prioritize Qixi as their key marketing moments.

"According to our research, 92 percent of Gartner L2 Luxury China Digital IQ Index brands feature Qixi campaigns on their WeChat account. Therefore, Qixi is an opportunity both to drive sales and to build brand awareness."

### Love story

Celebrated on Aug. 7 this year, Qixi is focused on love. While considered China's answer to Valentine's Day, the celebrations and foundations for the holiday differ from its Western counterpart.

Qixi is based on the mythological story of the cowherd and the weaver girl, whose love was forbidden. The couple was banished to opposite sides of a river, symbolized by the Milky Way.

Once a year on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, it is said that magpies build a bridge so that the lovers can reunite for a single day.

Young women and girls traditionally celebrated Qixi by praying to find a good husband in the future. The festival

also includes a focus on handcraft such as needlework, with women asking for skills in this area.

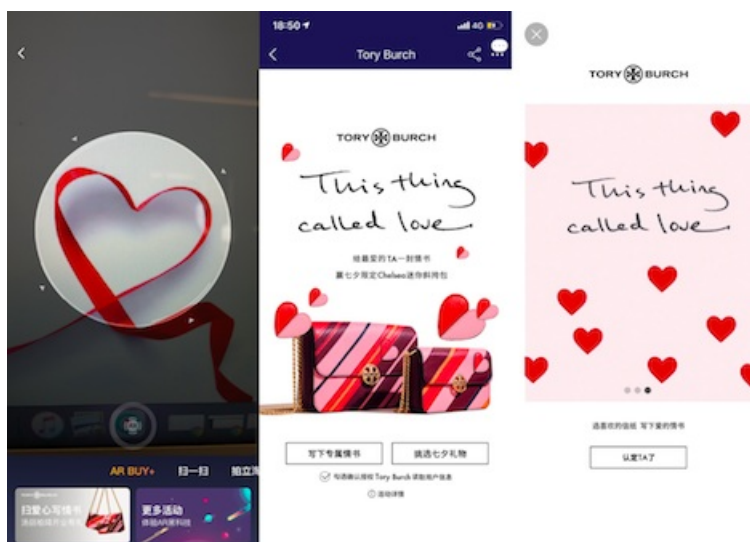
Along with tradition, Qixi today is marked similarly to Valentine's Day, with romantic dates and gifting.

Qixi is becoming a prime moment for luxury brands to launch stores on Chinese ecommerce platforms.

For this year's Qixi, Michael Kors is making its Tmall Luxury Pavilion debut. Marking the brand's first third-party ecommerce placement in China, the store will be the main platform used for launching new products in the market ([see story](#)).

In honor of Qixi, Michael Kors has launched a capsule collection of merchandise featuring graffiti inspired apparel, jewelry, watches, shoes and handbags.

Tory Burch is also launching on Tmall Luxury Pavilion for the holiday. In addition to retailing a capsule collection on the retail platform, the brand has launched an augmented reality shopping experience.



*Tory Burch's Qixi promotion leverages AR. Image credit: Alibaba*

Consumers can use the AR Buy+ feature on Taobao to scan heart-shaped features around them. This brings up a page that allows them to write and send love notes.

Ecommerce platform Secoo is similarly seeking to drive sales around Qixi through partnerships with seven luxury brands on limited-edition merchandise.

Similarly to Michael Kors and Tory Burch, Balmain is taking the holiday as a prime time to expand its Chinese ecommerce presence. Balmain launched its store on Secoo on July 23, including a range of five limited-edition Qixi products.

Other Secoo Qixi offerings include an embroidered handbag from Aspinal of London, a handful of love-themed Versace gifts and Roger Vivier accessories.

Secoo is also highlighting gift options through an online campaign dubbed "The Guide to Love."

Outside of ecommerce platforms, luxury brands are seeking consumers' attention.

Dior launched a capsule collection dubbed "Dioramour" that features apparel and accessories with sayings such as "Je t'aime Dior" and cartoon hearts. The capsule is being sold on Dior's newly launched China ecommerce site, which opened in late July.

Dior is pleased to announce the official launch of its e-commerce website in China <https://t.co/vhwf1HWEg5>, where you will discover the exclusive 'Dioramour' capsule along with accessories and ready-to-wear items from the House's collections for women and men.

[pic.twitter.com/DxilnhnWa4](https://pic.twitter.com/DxilnhnWa4)

Dior (@Dior) July 21, 2019

*Tweet from Dior*

Dior also launched a pop-up in Shanghai in July. A hashtag around the July opening event for the "Miss Dior: Love and Rose" store has attracted 170 million views and 810,000 discussions on Weibo, according to Gartner L2.

Other brands are launching creative campaigns around the holiday.

According to [Campaign Brief Asia](#), Burberry worked with Shanghai-based agency Tomorrow to develop a digital campaign that moves outside of the traditional romantic definition of love, reaching consumers who may not be in a relationship. Meant to reflect the modern attitudes towards love, the four-episode series speaks to ideas such as a love of your pet or love of yourself.

Among the examples of love is a couple who is separated by distance, but who make it work with technology.

Aside from the unconventional depictions of love, Burberry's campaign stands out for its focus on story over product promotion. However, the social media effort does include shopping functions, including a WeChat mini program with a virtual reality experience that lets consumers browse products in physical spaces.



*Burberry's campaign is running across its social media platforms in China. Image credit: Burberry*

"As more brands started to invest in Qixi campaigns, it has become harder to truly stand out and move the needle," Ms. Song said.

Some of the other tactics that brands are taking include flash sales of special-editions and partnerships with KOLs and celebrities, according to Ms. Song.

China connection

Marketing around Qixi, such as Burberry's promotion, is reflecting modern themes of independence.

Leading up to Valentine's Day earlier this year, luxury brands similarly expanded their marketing efforts beyond typical romantic themes, taking into account the diversity of love.

In addition to amorous themes, brands are pushing consumers to self-gift or celebrate the platonic loves in their lives. Breaking out of the romantic mold may help brands reach more consumers around the holiday, which has previously been more limited to those in relationships ([see story](#)).

At Qixi and year-round, digital channels are key to engaging a Chinese audience.

Luxury brands Louis Vuitton, Bulgari and Cartier successfully reach digitally savvy Chinese consumers by effectively leveraging influencer relationships and Eastern social media platforms.

According to Gartner L2's 2019 "Digital IQ Index: Luxury China" report, luxury adoption of Chinese ecommerce stores is on the rise. Brands that are more open to flexibility and collaboration are also partnering with Chinese business-to-consumer platforms that offer large audiences and logistical support ([see story](#)).

For Qixi, partnerships with e-tailers are also key.

"Ecommerce platforms are important in Qixi strategy because a large part of Qixi product discovery happens on these platforms," Ms. Song said. "Tmall/Taobao has facilitated such process by prioritizing Qixi product recommendations on its homepage.

"For brands that are officially selling on e-tailer platforms, it's critical to drive the traffic to their own stores," she said. "Many brands such as Pandora, Jo Malone and Giorgio Armani Beauty hosted a Tmall Super Brand Day as part

of their Qixi campaign and are able to capitalize on the Qixi traffic on Tmall.

"We've also noticed jewelry brands such as APM Monaco and Swarovski products getting prioritized upon searching 'Qixi' or 'Qixi gifts' on Tmall, so it's important to work closely with e-tailers to gain visibility."

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