

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

How niche brands create social media sales in China

September 4, 2020



This summer, the niche bag and accessories label By Far took Chinese social media by storm thanks to excellent branding via social sales platforms. Image credit: By Far

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This summer, bag and accessories label **By Far** took Chinese social media by storm despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Chinese fashion influencers brought the Instagram darling to China's Weibo, WeChat and Little Red Book platforms, more **millennial** and **Gen Z customers** have become loyal fans of the niche Bulgarian brand.

By Far is known for its unique designs and vintage details. Every season, the brand always offers customers some classic "it" bags and leads trends on fashion-featured social media.

According to the brand's founder, By Far's aesthetic is inspired by styles from the late-Eighties, the Nineties and the early 2000s.

For example, its Mini Rachel bag, which is now one of the most popular bags by the brand, was smartly based on the style of the character Rachel from the nineties sitcom "Friends."

"By Far has got this era's social media DNA," said Martha Tu, a fashion researcher at Central Saint Martins College.

Ms. Tu said the brand knows how to connect with the local social atmosphere, such as with the branding of its "armpit bag" on ecommerce platforms in China.

Recently, By Far launched a WeChat Mini Program in China that serves as a shopping space on the social messaging app **WeChat**. It is currently one of the most effective tools for brands to set up ecommerce functions, as it directs their WeChat followers to buy products and make payments.

For niche **brands**, WeChat and other social media will be the top battlefield of luxury marketing in the foreseeable future.

High-end luxury brands such as Cartier, **Bulgari** and **Dior** already have a heavy presence on WeChat, yet By Far's social marketing in China has shown the best path to converting online traffic a quick way to expand a customer

base.

As the top social media app for Chinese consumers, WeChat accumulated more than 1.15 billion monthly active users in 2019 and has become the most strategically important space for marketing campaigns.

Much in the way many emerging designer brands use a "mood" to succeed on Instagram, brands can use WeChat Mini Program to mimic that success.

The social DNA of brands such as By Far is useful for winning over young customers, creating purchasing motives, and enhancing brand consistency via images.

By Far's ambitious commercialization can also be seen in its naming of celebrity **KOL** Grace Chow as its new face.

The influencer had an affair with a famous Chinese singer months ago but then found fame among younger women.

The constant news about Chow has helped By Far win over some new followers, but the controversy might be problematic for the brand in the future.

Luxury brands love to collaborate with high-profile stars and bloggers in China, but controversial influencers usually are not a top choice.

Some fashion critics believe that after seeing huge potential on Chinese social media and catering to the country's mass-market, By Far could lose its niche positioning.

Yet the company's founders Ignatova, her twin sister Sabina Gyosheva, and their lifelong friend Denitsa Bumbarov still plan to expand the brand's physical presence in China.

When asked about their future vision, Ignatova said, "We believe this is just a start, and the future will show our true potential."

For brands such as By Far, signature products are good, but they are not enough for achieving long-term success in China.

For a niche brand, its designs should be worth the money and have customers raving about them.

"Chinese consumers are the early adopters of the e-market and can have a big impact on a brand's growth and success in the longer term," said Marble Xia, a senior fashion editor at Elle. "After all, niche brands' value will be judged by online traffic and sales profits here in China."

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