

MARKETING

Post-COVID, fashion houses are changing their approach to runway shows

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Spring/summer 2021 ready-to-wear show. Image credit: Chanel

By NORA HOWE

After the luxury industry took an enormous hit with the COVID-19 pandemic, fashion labels have turned to new ways to share their upcoming collections with media and consumers.

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Over the last year, there has been a significant shift in the brand marketing and live production strategies of luxury fashion houses around the world. In the face of adversity, brands such as Chanel, Balenciaga and Givenchy, to name a few, have made apparent strides towards preserving the relevance and creative nature of the fashion industry.

"The focus right now is on establishing consumer relationships and building community," said Dalia Strum, educator at **The Fashion Institute of Technology** and founder of the branding agency **RethinkConnect**, New York. "There are limited opportunities in fashion during the pandemic due to the lack of major events and even daily activities that would create a desire to invest in apparel.

"Brands that are going to succeed will invest in marketing strategies at the top of the marketing funnel: awareness, advocacy, etc.," she said. "While there might not be an influx of sales during the pandemic, it doesn't decrease the need or even desire for luxury items."

Difference a year makes

In 2019, French luxury fashion house Louis Vuitton invited YouTube star Emma Chamberlain to create content at several of their fashion shows ([see story](#)). One year later, however, the idea of someone attending a physical runway show at an airport has become unconscionable.

During fashion weeks, brands rely heavily on a front row filled with recognizable celebrities and industry leaders to gain respect and admiration. When those seats are removed or limited, brands must strategize new ways to leverage those same celebrities and leaders without posing a threat to their health and safety.

Although lockdowns were imposed in Europe and the United States starting in mid-March, digital fashion weeks began in earnest this summer.

Of the 47 brands analyzed in a recent report from Fashionbi, 24 did public livestreams for their runway shows or presentations. All but 5 brands chose Instagram as at least one of their social media platforms to live stream ([see story](#)).

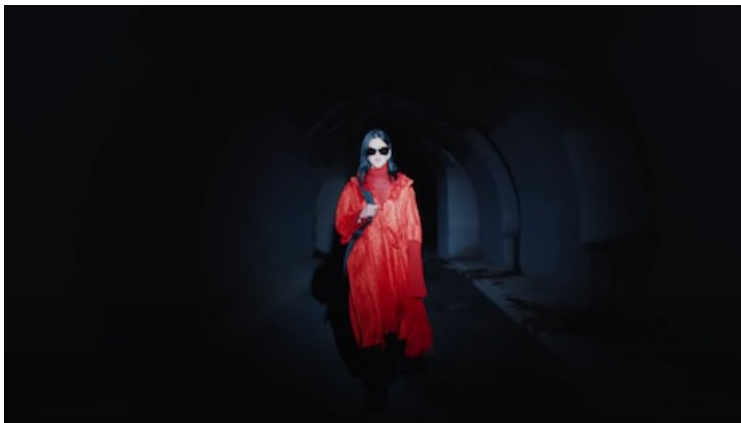
This year, like many brands, French fashion house Chanel livestreamed its spring/summer 2021 ready-to-wear show from Paris, but still utilized its relationships with celebrity ambassadors in a series of interviews with Margot Robbie, Kristen Stewart, Lily-Rose Depp and more regarding their impressions of the show.

Margot Robbie with Laura Bailey after the Chanel SS21 Show

French fashion label Balenciaga and creative director Demna Gvasalia have notoriously curated obscure and somewhat theatrical runway spectacles in previous years. The autumn/winter 2020 collection was presented on a flooded runway in a frightening apocalyptic show, bringing awareness to the threat of climate change.

This season, many speculated how the provocateur would promote the 2021 collection in lieu of a physical show. Thus premiered the socially distant and health conscious music video introducing the label's new collection at Paris Fashion Week in early October.

The video features different models walking purposefully through the nighttime streets of Paris, going through changes and morphing into new people as they go, but all meeting together as a group in the end. It serves as an ode to hope that we will persevere through the challenges of this year.



Still from Balenciaga Summer 21 Pre-collection music video. Image credit: Balenciaga

French luxury fashion house Givenchy had one of the most anticipated runway events this year, but similar to Balenciaga, passed on the idea of a live, in-person show. Instead, the label released images of the 54 looks.

The spring/summer 2021 collection is a celebration of the people who will wear the clothes, and as society reexamines the human condition this year, Givenchy is attempting to find humanity in luxury.

Future of fashion

While many brands found ways to reinvent Fashion Week and executed new strategies for reaching their affluent markets, others are simply waiting until later in the year a move that may disrupt the fashion calendar.

New York-based designer Michael Kors is part of a small group of designers and labels who opted out of New York Fashion Week. Instead, Mr. Kors is planning to present his spring/summer 2021 collection in mid-October through the brand's social and digital platforms, encouraging a shift towards a slower-pace, two-show fashion calendar ([see story](#)).

Italian fashion house Gucci is another label to suggest scaling the number of shows per year from five to two. This decision will likely have a domino effect on other designers and labels, and will impact the business of fashion and its ecosystem affecting all constituents that depend on runway events ([see story](#)).

"Consumers are looking for points of inspiration to keep them motivated especially for their post-pandemic plans," Ms. Strum said. "Storytelling is going to be key to create stronger connections to personal belongings.

The more these brands re-embrace these strategies, they will be able to increase their longevity within this industry."