

MARKETING

As pandemic progresses, luxury female buyers are seeking responsibility and transparency

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COVID's Impact on the Female Luxury Buyer October 2020. Image credit: Spark NYC

By NORA HOWE

As cultural shifts resulting from the coronavirus pandemic continue to unravel, luxury female consumers are now more interested in digital retailers who can prove social responsibility and deliver purity with transparency.

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Consumer mindsets and purchasing behaviors have shifted due to heightened health risk, political tension and global unrest and these factors have transformed how women approach luxury retail, according to a new report from [Spark Ideas](#). The report takes a detailed look at how women are feeling in this new chapter of the pandemic, how social issues have affected their views of luxury and how they have engaged with ecommerce initiatives.

"Brands need to look for ways to express purity by simply focusing on what the brand does best, with execution that transcends the ordinary with pure luxury," said Malinda Sanna, founder and CEO of Spark Ideas LLC, New York.

Research was conducted in September as major shifts occurred around the pandemic against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement, political uncertainty and economic fragility. The 25 women who participated in this study are members of a larger highly curated and engaged network of female luxury buyers in the United States.

Participants were interviewed through [LookLook Mobile Ethnography](#), a proprietary mobile insights platform from Spark Ideas that gathers real-time insights from consumers through one-on-one conversations, videos, screenshots and back-and-forth dialogue.

What women want

The pandemic put many things into perspective and luxury female buyers have realized how life can become fragile, according to the research from Spark.

In this phase of the pandemic, though, women are starting to browse and buy again. Women seem to be living in the moment and spending on experiences with friends and family while also investing in education and real estate.

During the first few months of the pandemic, retailers saw an increase in spending on athleisure apparel, baking

and cooking materials and home decor. Now, women have shifted their spending since the early days of COVID-19 and are buying casual dresses and luxury sneakers, booking at-home private chefs and investing in real estate and art.



The Spark U.S. Luxury Collective: 26 women aged 20-60. Image credit: Spark NYC

Skincare has become the new self-care as COVID-19 has taken a physical toll on people increased levels of stress, lack of Vitamin D and mask-induced acne, to name a few.

According to the study, female luxury consumers have created at-home spas, experimented with new beauty brands and treatments and have even invited aestheticians to their homes. Women seem to be pulling back on cosmetic maintenance and emphasizing natural care.

"Cosmetic brands should pay attention to the benefits of skincare that the luxury buyer is seeking, such as natural glow and radiance, and consider "transition" products for when the female consumer starts to venture into the world again," said Ms. Sanna.

"She may not feel that the full makeup routine she used to follow is relevant or even desirable anymore," she said.

Luxury browsing has gone digital and women are searching for a stand-out virtual shopping experienceone that could potentially capture the essence of in-store shopping. According to Spark, younger buyers would like to see more augmented reality and smarter algorithms, but maintain a high-service experience.

Today, buyers are highly educated and are looking to brands that will align with their values. According to Spark, women are displeased with the current social climate and expect brands to support diversity and inclusion while also producing more sustainable fashion.

The female luxury buyer craves concrete action from brandsnot just surface-level social and environmental advocacy. Buyers want to see brands championing talent of BIPOC in leadership positions and adjusting production strategies that align with sustainability efforts.



Women are looking for brands to support BIPOC and sustainability. Image credit: Spark NYC

Along with sustainability practices, buyers want brands to become more transparent, especially in regards to their efforts to mitigate health risk due to COVID-19. Brands should be open with their plans for re-opening and resuming events, as well as their plans for structural sustainable change. Buyers simply want to know what brands are thinking.

Luxury that means something

Since the pandemic has had an incredible emotional and physical impact on people and companies, refocusing on health and wellbeing has been a common theme across all luxury sectors. In the face of so much hardship, consumers are looking to invest in meaningful products and services and looking to brands for supportive messaging.

In June, De Beers Group predicted that U.S. consumers would prioritize purchasing meaningful gifts that retain their value. Consumers feel grateful for things that they used to take for granted, such as spending time with family, and this will likely influence their purchasing and gifting behavior in the future ([see story](#)).

Hotel group Marriott International created a travel documentary series which gives consumers a taste of adventure at a time when many have put trips on hold. The series is both beautiful and a meaningful portrayal of the human condition and, at a time when people are feeling discouraged by the present situation, Marriott is reminding travelers of their yearning for an understanding of the human experience ([see story](#)).

"The principles of purpose, personal and pure are the key takeaways for the next six to eight months, as we continue to deal with the pandemic and its aftermath," Ms. Sanna said. "Brands should make it easy for women to justify their luxury purchases and should remind consumers what they stand for and be transparent about their commitments to a larger purpose."

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