

MARKETING

## Red Book is promising upstart of China's social media scene

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Compared to Tmall and Weibo, The Red Book App is still a new social media platform in China. Image credit: Shutterstock

By ELLEN KELLEHER

Luxury brands including [Louis Vuitton](#), [Gucci](#) and [Dior](#) are embracing Chinese social media platform The Red Book as it emerges as another avenue to engage affluent shoppers despite its smaller audience.

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Compared to WeChat, Weibo and other top Chinese ecommerce platforms, The Red Book is still new and struggles to compete in terms of technical innovation, according to [Fashionbi's "The Red Book App" report](#). However, the number of key opinion leaders (KOLs) on the platform is driving the popularity of its brands, which are gaining 2,400 followers per month on average.

"In terms of engagement on official brands' accounts, the Red Book is quite behind WeChat and Weibo," said Yana Bushmeleva, chief operating officer at [Fashionbi](#), Milan. "However, the correct work with KOLs can drive sales on Red Book and outside the platform."

### Popularity exploding

Known as Xiaohongshu in China, The Red Book hosts more than 30,000 brands and nearly 10,000 third-party ecommerce merchants, and offers more than 100,000 different products. Similar to Instagram, users can send pictures, text and video via the app as well as make and upload their own "moments" like Instagram Stories.

KOLs or influencers play a key role on the site as they tend to publish notes on products recommended by celebrities. General users can accept product recommendations and create their own notes after they purchase a particular product.



The Red Book has an independent ecommerce system for brands on the platform, including Gucci. Image credit: Fashionbi

As of August, Lancme is the most popular Western brand on The Red Book with 191,000 followers, followed by YSL Beauty and Louis Vuitton with 187,000 and 185,000 respectively.

However, the pace of growth on the platform is steady. After launching on the site earlier this year, Gucci, for instance, now has 93,000 followers while Guerlain and Armani Beauty boast 112,000 and 58,000 followers, respectively.

The way luxury brands are using the site also is becoming increasingly creative. Last year, Tiffany & Co. introduced a Chinese Valentine's Day marketing event, which encouraged celebrities to follow the hashtag #showmytiffany and then relied on key opinion leaders to post notes, share purchase experiences and display various Tiffany accessories.



Louis Vuitton has worked with KOLs on The Red Book. Image credit: Fashionbi

This year, Louis Vuitton made its mark as the first luxury brand to try a new live broadcast method on the platform. The French fashion brand chose blogger Yvonne Ching to lead the audience and watch every part of the Louis Vuitton collection.

"Louis Vuitton was the first to do the presentation of the collection in a format of livestreaming, which was made in collaboration with key opinion leaders," Ms. Bushmeleva said.

Dior also got in on the act by publishing a series of notes and videos about its limited series "Dioramour" for Chinese Valentine's day in August of 2020. In a similar fashion, Gucci used The Red Book to create marketing events for the holiday, which included micro-movies starring Chinese celebrities about love stories and themed looks with Chinese actor Gulinazha.

In another creative move, Burberry asked Chinese fashion bloggers Lingli Cheng and @yuyuzhangzou as well as the female singer Akini Jing to create three different types of styling guides by wearing items from the brand's 2020 spring/summer collection.



*The newly opened Burberry store in Shenzhen, China is a blend of physical and social retail. Image courtesy of Burberry*

The British fashion label also invited Weilong Song, a popular celebrity in China, to explore its new social retail boutique "Burberry space." Relevant notes on store visits and store addresses were posted on The Red Book.

This year, The Red Book's platform users have exceeded 100 million and its main devotees are women who are between the ages of 12 and 40, according to Fashionbi. Its population of monthly active users of 45.5 million is still small when compared to WeChat's 12.025 billion and Weibo's 560 million monthly active users.

KOLs are a powerful presence on the site as 71 percent have from 10,000 to 100,000 followers. Female Chinese celebrities, fashion store owners, make-up artists and fashionistas rank among the leaders of The Red Book's KOL lineup.

Beauty brands dominate the list of luxury brands with a presence on the site, followed by fashion, food and personal care brands.

Users are also spread across China, with 10.2 percent of those flocking to the site located in Guangdong, another 7.2 percent in the province of Shandong and 7 percent in Jiangsu.

#### Competitive market

The Red Book faces competitive challenges as Weibo is still the most-used platform for unveiling new brand ambassadors or for displaying the latest advertisements or news of events.

Douyin, the Chinese version of Tiktok, Bilibili, a site similar to YouTube, and WeChat, a mobile application used by more than 1 billion people, also pose a threat.

Cosmetics brands La Mer and La Prairie see the most attention from luxury consumers on Weibo.

Luxury automotive brands also have significant potential to capture their consumers, as affluents discuss high-end auto on the Weibo app much more than the general population ([see story](#)).

As brands look to reverse revenue dips due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese market is crucial for business strategy and development.

Gucci, for instance, has steadily been expanding its reach in China and widening its digital ecosystem by launching [gucci.cn](#) in 2017.

Last year, Gucci reported that 16 million viewers connected on Weibo to watch the brand's spring 2020 show, the first time the brand had livestreamed its show on the platform.

The brand has also built a strong presence on China's most important social media platforms, launching on Weibo in 2011, WeChat in 2013 and Little Red Book and Douyin in 2020 ([see story](#)).

Gucci's strategy is wise given the haste with which its rivals are now trying to access the Chinese market.

"China is one of the most important markets for premium and luxury brands and nowadays, it is basically the only active market," Ms. Bushmeleva said. "The E.U. and the U.S. are still under restrictions for COVID-19 while in China

during the last weeks we witnessed many offline events by the European brands."

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