

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Savvy luxury labels diversifying digital offerings

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Burberry's B Surf video game let players dress their characters. Image credit: Burberry

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Luxury fashion brands have leveraged technology at unprecedented levels since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but these efforts are going beyond more mainstream or "traditional" digital channels.

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According to a new report from creative agency **B-Reel** and data insights company **Whispr Group**, digitally-savvy brands such as Gucci have continued to widen the gap between more hesitant luxury labels. The "**Internet of Luxury**" report evaluated how luxury fashion brands drove online conversations through various digital efforts.

"We've seen more innovation in the past year than in years prior," said Melissa Jackson-Parsey, chief strategy officer at creative agency **B-Reel**, New York. "Necessity is obviously the mother of invention, but we've seen more systemic changes take root.

"With breakout successes generating more than their share of attention over the past year, we foresee others following suit and actively experimenting, further fueling innovation in the sector," she said. "With the notion of luxury' as a result, evolving at the speed of technology."

All figures for online mentions in the report was collected from public social media accounts, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, blogs and forums.

Digital evolution

Innovative brands in the luxury space have begun finding success on gaming platforms, a pairing that was once unexpected.

Online mentions of luxury and gaming grew by 118 percent year-over-year, when comparing changes from 2019 to 2020 and 2018 to 2019. Total luxury and gaming mentions numbered 3.4 thousand.

Two luxury labels known for their digital experimentation, France's Louis Vuitton and Britain's Burberry, drove much of these conversations.

Burberry's livestreamed runway show on Twitch and Louis Vuitton's collaboration with League of Legends ([see](#)

story) accounted for 13 percent and 12 percent, respectively, of all luxury/gaming conversations.



Louis Vuitton skin for the League of Legends game. Image credit: Riot Games

Examining the same time periods, mentions of luxury and virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) also saw strong growth.

Total mentions were 4.8 thousand, an increase of 62 percent year-over-year.

The two events that generated the most luxury and VR/AR conversations were the virtual Circular Fashion Summit (CFS) in July and digital Paris Fashion Week in September.

While brands relied on platforms including YouTube, Instagram and others to present collections during lockdowns, overall online engagement in fashion show dropped by 48 percent in 2020. After 18.8 million fashion week mentions in 2019, fashion week mentions failed to surpass the 10 million mark in 2020 landing at 9.9 million.

Italian fashion label Gucci was a notable exception, with an increase of 901 percent in fashion week mentions from 2019 to 2020. Mentions peaked in July 2020, when Gucci presented its Epilogue collection during a livestream in Rome (see story).

"Based on our data, those who saw deeper engagement, such as Balenciaga and Gucci, didn't just host virtual shows," Ms. Jackson-Parsey said. "They created immersive experiences that leveraged new technologies available to them.

"As a result, the experiences themselves were interesting to interact with, and conversation-worthy," she said.

Italy's Valentino also successfully engaged consumers, leading to fashion week mentions jumping 34 percent year-over-year. However, the brand's engagement peaked pre-COVID when singer Tahliah Debrett Barnett, better known as FKA twigs, performed at the men's fall/winter fashion show last January.

"It's also notable that a lot of engagement around fashion shows is also driven by the people in attendance or associated with them," Ms. Jackson-Parsey said. "Hence brands also need to explore how they leverage these cultural instigators as part of these digital experiences, to help amplify their reach."

[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Valentino (@maisonvalentino)

FKA twigs performing for Valentino

Despite dominating mentions about luxury and gaming with its spring/summer 2021 show on Twitch, Burberry saw online conversations fall 26 percent compared to its spring/summer 2020 show.

The report also evaluated which luxury brands improved their engagement across their own primary social channels: Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

Italian fashion brand Bottega Veneta had actually grown its followers by 22 percent year-over-year before unceremoniously deleting its social media accounts ([see story](#)).

Other fashion brands making double-digit gains in followings include Celine, Off-White, Fendi, Prada and Dior.

Louis Vuitton and Chanel made more modest gains in follower counts, at a respective 8 and 7 percent, but have the largest social media audiences in luxury. Chanel boasts 76.1 million followers compared to Louis Vuitton's 71.4 million.

Gucci, with growth of 9 percent, trails with 67.2 million followers combined across the four leading platforms.

Adaptation continues

As luxury fashion brands face another season of untraditional fashion weeks, expectations from consumers are only getting higher, according to Ms. Jackson-Parsey.

For Paris Haute Couture Week, online retailer Net-A-Porter is partnering with Israeli designer Alber Elbaz on a new livestreaming project to reach digital-first consumers.

The "The Talk Show with Alber & Friends" celebrates the launch of Mr. Elbaz's new brand AZ Factory, an evolutionary fashion concept dedicated to innovative womenswear. The VR experience will allow viewers to virtually "hop on" the truck in various cities and explore the products in 3D ([see story](#)).

The next iteration of London Fashion Week will stay virtual, in light of the evolving coronavirus crisis.

Running from Feb. 19 to Feb. 23, London Fashion Week will be a digital-first event with scaled back in-person events. The organization will launch a campaign focusing on menswear through January, using the LFW platform to promote online showrooms and networking ([see story](#)).

"The activity we saw in the past year is just the beginning," B-Reel's Ms. Jackson-Parsey said. "Brands are going to have to be more comfortable experimenting.

"They're also going to need to invest in growing new skill sets," she said. "For example, thinking of themselves more as data and UX companies, creating seamless and compelling, personal experiences for customers across digital and physical spaces."