

MARKETING

## Leveraging consumers as a marketing channel the key in China

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*Fendi has released a capsule collection for Chinese New Year. Image credit: Fendi*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Luxury labels hoping to build their business in China would be wise to go beyond rudimentary translations, and instead continue to build genuine connections with key opinion customers.

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During a webinar on Feb. 24, executives from fashion cloud technology company [Launchmetrics](#) discussed how luxury brands should adapt their marketing strategies to best reach Chinese affluents. China is becoming the most important market for luxury brands, particularly because of the strength of its post-pandemic economic recovery.

"In China, more than any country in the West, the consumer purchase is really driven by this social influence," said Alison Bring, chief marketing officer at Launchmetrics, Paris. "Creating a dialogue with your customer is key."

### Connecting with China

According to research from Launchmetrics, fashion labels Moncler, Balenciaga, Fendi and Herms are among those finding the most recent success in China.

Because of the Great Firewall, brands have to primarily rely on Chinese social media platforms to reach consumers in the market especially with the exponential growth of ecommerce.

While WeChat may be the most well-known Chinese platform, especially with its popular mini programs, Launchmetrics found that Weibo had the highest Media Impact Value (MIV) for brands. Weibo has features including livestreaming and temporary posts similar to Instagram Stories.

"Weibo has really positioned itself as this launchpad for viral content when it comes to brands and influencers alike," Ms. Bring said. "Having a platform that allows you to create that viral effect with your content is even more important when trying to connect with today's modern consumer."

While many Western and Chinese social media platforms may function similarly such as Douyin and TikTok, which are both owned by Beijing-based ByteDance consumers are looking for different types of content.

Chinese consumers are more geared to building reciprocity and relationships with brands, and this needs to be

reflected in marketing strategies. Translating or recreating Western campaigns will not always resonate with Chinese audiences.

Another difference between consumers in China and other Asian markets compared to Westerners is the high number of touchpoints before making a purchase. For instance, product pages on ecommerce platform Tmall are more thorough than Amazon sometimes even including manufacturing certificates and other proof of authenticity in addition to more product photos or videos.

"That's really evidence that consumers need more information, and they need to build that trust with a brand," said Elijah Whaley, vice president of APAC at Launchmetrics, Shanghai.

To do so, brands need to be accessible and spend more time building connections. Mr. Whaley also recommends marketers also look at consumers in a similar lens as key opinion leaders (KOLs), who are essentially the Chinese equivalent of influencers.

"The local brands dominating the market have taken on this strategy around KOC, key opinion customers, leveraging customers as a marketing channel," Mr. Whaley said. "There are powerful voices that go beyond KOL and at the end, those really are your customers."

Tactics to engage KOC could be as straightforward as having extravagant packaging to encourage consumers to create unboxing videos, which can quickly gain traction among social media users.

#### Emerging platforms

Beyond well-known platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, luxury marketers need to be aware of emerging platforms in China.

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.

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 a recent report from Fashionbi. However, the number of KOLs on the platform is driving the popularity of its brands, which are gaining 2,400 followers per month on average ([see story](#)).

Social media platform Bilibili is on the rise among the youth in China as video sharing continues to dominate in the world of online community entertainment.

Bilibili provides an immersive entertainment experience and high-quality content, while thriving on community-building and authenticity. Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Prada are among the brands already on the platform ([see story](#)).

"That's a channel that any brand could potentially and should be looking at," Launchmetrics' Mr. Whaley said. "The user engagement or engagement on the platform is really superb."