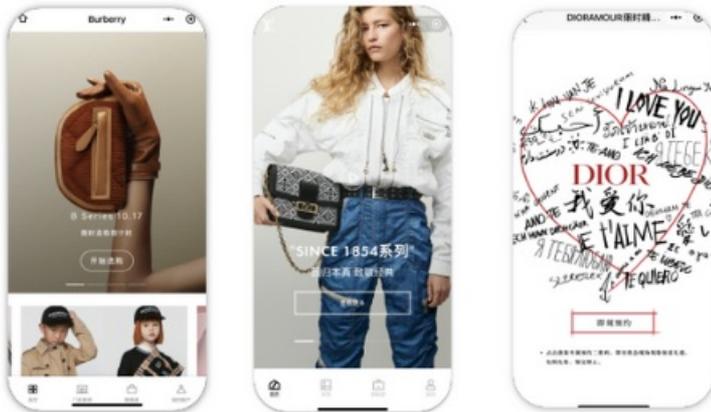


MARKETING

WeChat cannot be overlooked by luxury brands in China

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Luxury brands rely on WeChat to reach billions of users in China. Image credit: Fashionbi/WeChat

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Mobile application WeChat is still the bellwether for luxury brands looking to improve their omnichannel marketing to better reach affluent consumers in China.

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According to Fashionbi's "[Omni-Marketing Via WeChat](#)" report, mini programs are a low-cost investment for brands to introduce different touchpoints, from ecommerce to livestreaming and games. Effectively leveraging WeChat has become even more essential for luxury brands, as the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of a cohesive omnichannel strategy.

"WeChat is the most advanced platform that combines multiple functions," said Yana Bushmeleva, chief operating officer at [Fashionbi](#), Milan. "It went far beyond messaging app and became a lifestyle companion which you can use as a bank, online store, TV and so on.

"WeChat gives endless possibilities for experiments," she said.

Mini programs with many options

According to research from Boston Consulting Group and WeChat owner-Tenecent, a third of luxury purchases in China were done online in 2020, up from 12 percent in 2019. Two-thirds of luxury shopping experiences are omnichannel, with consumers beginning their research online but completing their purchase in-store.

This will likely continue to evolve, as luxury shoppers in China are getting younger. Half of 2020's luxury shoppers were under the age of 30, while Gen Z and millennial consumers accounted for 47 percent of luxury spend last year.



Mini programs have a range of social and commercial features. Image credit: Fashionbi

These younger consumers are more digitally-savvy, and will engage with a brand through multiple channels for weeks before making a purchase.

Therein lies much of the appeal of mini programs, which gives brands a diverse set of options to reach users without needing to build and launch new apps from scratch. As Ms. Bushmeleva noted, many brands run several mini programs at once.

Embracing mini programs has been successful for WeChat and partner brands. The gross merchandise value of mini program commodity transactions has jumped 115 percent year-over-year, as of August 2020, with luxury goods being among the fastest-growing sectors.

WeChat also continues to introduce new features to its mini programs, keeping its more than 400 million daily active mini program users engaged. These fall into several categories, from shopping options, product related features, promotional activities and brand events.

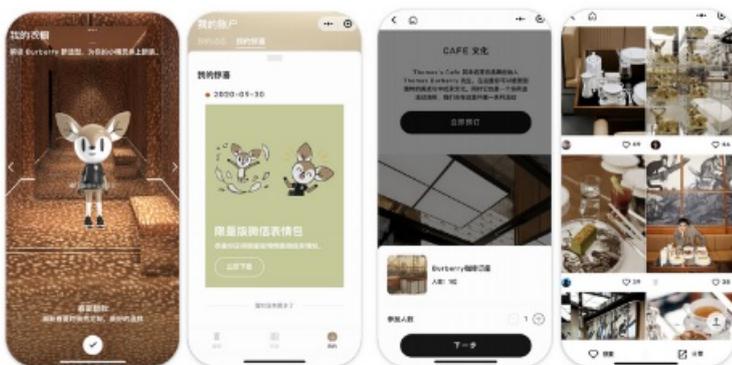
Brands can launch different types of online stores, such as limited-time boutiques or special series products. WeChat also makes it easy for shoppers to find their closest bricks-and-mortar location.

Using brand-specific customization options, luxury labels such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton have been able to launch exclusive phone wallpapers or WeChat emojis. French fashion house Saint Laurent used WeChat to offer personalized customization of its hoodies for the first time.

British fashion label Burberry has experimented with different iterations of WeChat's virtual shopping guides.

In one instance, Burberry created an avatar of brand ambassador Zhou Dongyu with her voice helping users navigate digital recreations of physical boutiques. Another effort allowed users to follow a virtual animal elf completing different activities in the store.

Burberry also embraces omnichannel on WeChat, allowing users to make online reservations to the Thomas's Caf in Shenzhen and view photos from other visitors.



Burberry's mini programs integrate offline stores and online social platforms. Image credit: Fashionbi/WeChat

Other brands, including jewelers Tiffany & Co. and Cartier, also encourage consumers to use WeChat to make offline event reservations from meals at the Tiffany Blue Box Caf or appointments with sales associates.

Some brand activations have a sustainable component as well. For instance, through the Lancme mini program,

users can earn and redeem points by recycling empty beauty product bottles.

Chanel and Prada are among the fashion brands that have livestreamed their runway shows on WeChat, a feature that has grown in popularity amid the pandemic.

Beyond WeChat

While, WeChat remains the most dominate mobile platform in China, luxury marketers need to be aware of other online channels to reach affluent consumers.

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](#)).

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