

MARKETING

## Brand purpose will lead future communications strategies: report

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*A majority of respondents agreed that purpose-led conversations will need to sit at the forefront of brand communications strategy. Image credit: Fashion & Beauty Monitor*

By NORA HOWE

Fashion has historically been an expressive industry, driven by physical and real-life experiences, however, the COVID-19 pandemic suspended these touchpoints, creating new challenges for communications strategies.

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In its [State of Fashion Communications report](#), Fashion & Beauty Monitor explores the impact of the last 12 months on fashion public relations. It reveals how the pandemic has accelerated digital communications, and why these changes, despite their challenges, have been overwhelmingly positive, welcoming a new era for fashion communications.

Fashion & Beauty Monitor analyzed data collected from the 459 communications specialists within the fashion industry who responded to its global research online survey, distributed between January and February of this year.

### State of fashion PR

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, 27 percent of U.S. consumers initially said they planned to spend "somewhat" or "a lot" less on luxury and fashion items than they had budgeted for prior. Experts interviewed for this report attest to their communications budgets being frozen overnight while their fashion brands took stock of the situation and inevitable changes in consumer habits to come.

Communications has been instrumental in supporting the survival strategies of many fashion brands, as 70 percent of survey respondents agreed that over the past 12 months, their communications strategy has been pivotal in navigating the landscape that the pandemic has created. Two-thirds of respondents agreed their communications strategy has clearly increased revenue generation, over the same period.

For some brands, the various global crises provided the necessary impetus to reposition their brand. The survey also showed that 73 percent of respondents agreed that over the past 12 months, communications allowed them to realign their brand.

Interestingly, 69 percent of survey respondents said the purpose their PR and communications serves for their

businesses has remained the same, a notion challenged by many experts interviewed by Fashion & Beauty Monitor who feel that fashion brands have actually needed to pivot their business models significantly in response to pandemic restrictions.

London Fashion Week was one of the events most impacted within the fashion PR calendar last year, and organizer British Fashion Council had to adapt quickly to make it a digital-only event.

In June 2020, the Council debuted its first all-digital, gender-neutral fashion week with creative help from Wednesday Agency, which developed a bold campaign designed to work alongside the diverse styles of the designers showing in London ([see story](#)).



*Respondents said that 31 percent of their budgets are currently dedicated to influencer marketing. Image credit: Fashion & Beauty Monitor*

Additionally, many of the experts believe that, within the fashion sector, brands are being more careful in their influencer or talent collaborations, and they have seen this become a priority throughout the pandemic. More than half of survey respondents, 55 percent, have increased their focus on influencer marketing, and 53 percent say their online communications strategies have increased.

With fashion communications strategies being forced to go online throughout the pandemic, the survey found that influencer marketing has delivered the greatest success for brands over the past year, followed by television coverage.

The trend towards greater transparency in communications has encouraged many fashion labels and designers to open-up about their brand story, clarifying their values. More than a third, 37 percent, of survey respondents said they have increased their focus on purpose-led storytelling over the past year.

In a similar vein, sustainability and environmental efforts rank as the biggest cause for fashion brands. The majority of survey respondents, 60 percent, cited these factors as a focus within communications strategies, followed by diversity and inclusivity pushes and fighting COVID-19 at 48 and 36 percent, respectively.

French fashion house Christian Dior immersed itself in nature through the power of emotional storytelling. In an effort towards informing fashion consumers of the importance of environmental sustainability and celebrating Earth Month, the fashion brand released new installments of its "Tales of the Wild" series.

The new episodes feature two individuals who are dedicated to preserving all elements of nature and determined to find the symbiotic relationship between wildlife and mankind ([see story](#)).

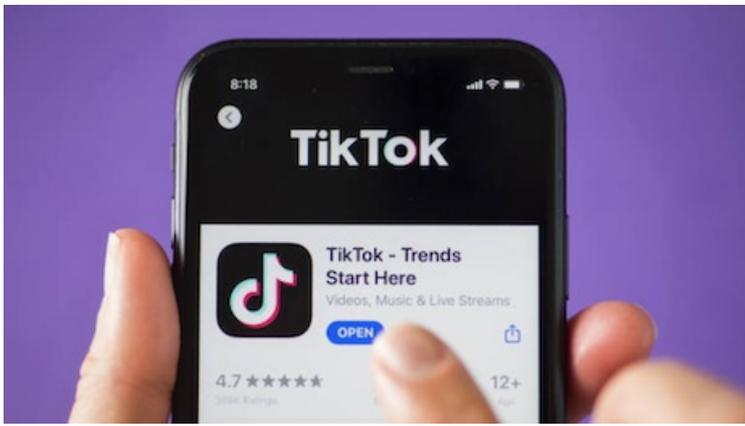
The past year has been huge for political activism, with movements such as Black Lives Matter taking center stage. Amid global protests against systemic racism, the movement shone a spotlight on the fashion world in its role as a cultural beacon, and some industry insiders began to speak out.

Italian fashion house Gucci's Chime for Change gender-equality initiative partnered with the African American Policy Forum to debut a special edition of its Chime Zine that advances a gender-inclusive narrative in the movement for Black lives.

Led by guest editor Kimberl Crenshaw, the [issue](#) featured the voices of Black women and called on the global community to join AAPF in their #SayHerName campaign ([see story](#)).

#### Overcoming challenges

While the past year has presented new opportunities for brands to step back and reevaluate their operational strategies, it has also presented a number of challenges.



*Fashion brands have been challenged with integrating platforms like TikTok into their communications strategies. Image credit: Getty*

Nearly a quarter, 24 percent, of survey respondents said that juggling the increasing variety of channels that can span communications has proven their biggest challenge over the past year, potentially exacerbated by traditional PR channels being suspended due to lockdown restrictions.

Brands have needed to accelerate their grasp of newly emerging social channels, such as TikTok and audio-based, invite-only network Clubhouse.

Clubhouse describes itself as a new type of social product based on voice where people can talk, tell stories, develop ideas, deepen friendships and meet people from around the world. Although it is still early, Clubhouse seems to be solidifying a new wave of marketing engagement.

Rather than promote products directly through on-the-nose messaging, brands must reevaluate how they want to communicate with their consumers and recognize that Clubhouse is a platform for conversation, not conversion. Consumers will be able to engage with brands in live, unscripted conversations on the topics that matter to them, such as social and environmental efforts the ultimate test of authenticity and transparency ([see story](#)).

From an economic perspective, 23 percent of survey respondents claimed that adhering to targets throughout periods of restriction and uncertainty is the greatest area of concern for them.

Additionally, a notable proportion of respondents, 18 percent, are anxious about the increasing demand by consumers for greater brand transparency and purpose-led approaches.

Consumers have started pledging allegiance to brands across multiple industries that have promoted sustainability practices and publicly celebrated environmentally-friendly initiatives, and according to Euromonitor's "Top 10 Global Consumer Trends" report, consumers are taking social and environmental issues more seriously, rewarding businesses that use their profits for good post-pandemic.

Brands that rebuild a greener and more equitable world could gain not only a competitive advantage but also the necessary societal trust to operate ([see story](#)).

Experts interviewed by Fashion & Beauty Monitor echoed this, saying that brand communications strategies will need to continue shifting in line with this objective, and believe brands will increasingly be held accountable for the information they share.