

MARKETING

Gossip Girl revival is luxury's new gateway to Gen Z

July 8, 2021



The new *Gossip Girl* is poised to impact the fashion industry. Image credit: HBO Max

By SARAH RAMIREZ

With the premiere of HBO Max's *Gossip Girl* reboot, established and emerging luxury brands have a new avenue for reaching the next generation of consumers.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

The new *Gossip Girl*, which debuts on the streaming platform on July 8 in the United States, follows the glamorous and scandalous lives of high schoolers in New York in the same vein as its predecessor, which aired from 2007 to 2012. Luxury brands from Louis Vuitton to Cartier and Tiffany & Co. were woven into the original show from the characters' clothing and accessories to complete storylines befitting their Upper East Side lifestyles and the revival offers another platform to reach potential shoppers who are more resistant to traditional forms of advertising.

"The world of *Gossip Girl* in 2007 might as well be another planet to today," said James Denman, executive director of strategy and digital innovation at **YARD NYC**, New York. "For luxury brands, the same holds true.

"From communication platforms to collaborations, the walled garden that luxury existed in has been torn down, and permissiveness that wasn't there is now prevalent in the world's biggest luxury brands," he said. "In truth, *Gossip Girl*'s reputation now isn't a hindrance, but an added benefit for those brands who may well be seeking to raise their profile by plugging more directly into pop culture and new audiences."

New generation

The original *Gossip Girl* was never a ratings blockbuster, peaking with 3.5 million viewers in its second season on The CW network. Nonetheless, with its charismatic and attractive young stars and soapy storylines, the series was a driving force in the popular culture conversation and became a defining show among millennial teenagers.

Propelled by the Internet in an era before Twitter and Instagram, *Gossip Girl* became a global sensation. In 2010, according to the **China Market Research Group**, nearly 5 million Chinese consumers watched each new episode of the show through illegal online channels.

"*Gossip Girl* has had a lasting impact on fans, and the original show still has a loyal following to this day," said Caressa Douglas, senior vice president of global strategic partnerships at **BEN Group**, Los Angeles. "Brands that did

appear in the original *Gossip Girl* are still benefiting from their participation, with new and old audiences alike returning to the show.

"Brands have watched the show become a cultural zeitgeist, and I anticipate they'll be eager to support the reboot for its name recognition, unique focus on fashion and beauty and key target audience," she said.

The Gossip Girl revival retains the original's edgy sex appeal

For 2021, HBO Max has given *Gossip Girl* a Gen Z makeover the new show stars a more diverse cast and features more socially-cognizant storylines and it already seems to be resonating with fashion brands and fans alike.

In March, French fashion label Chanel tapped 18-year-old Whitney Peak, one of the reboot's stars, as a brand ambassador. She appeared with other friends of the house in a teaser for Chanel's fall/winter 2021 fashion show.

Chanel is following its own lead with the appointment, as the brand recruited actor Blake Lively, who starred on the original *Gossip Girl* and now has a successful film career, as an ambassador for its Mademoiselle handbags back in 2011 ([see story](#)).



Whitney Peak for Chanel. Image credit: Chanel

More partnerships between luxury brands and the new cast are likely to follow, with marketers looking to make inroads with Gen Zers and younger millennials as their purchasing power and influence grows.

"You're getting the opportunity to double dip with audiences," Mr. Denman said. "On one hand, you can introduce the show's new Gen Z audience to the brand, while hitting the late millennial who watched the show during its original run with a new context for your brand at the same time.

"Combine that with the context of the show at large, and you have a compelling fit for those brands that can see the value in the audiences," he said.

Already, there are numerous Instagram fan accounts identifying the clothing and accessories seen on *Gossip Girl's* teasers and other promotional content, as well as paparazzi photos and social media posts from the cast.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Gossip Girl Closet (@gossipgirlstyleguide)

Gossip Girl Closet has more than 12 thousand Instagram followers and sources the clothing, footwear and accessories seen on the series

"*Gossip Girl* was the longest-running fashion show since *Sex and the City*," said Carolyn Hadlock, principal and executive creative director at creative agency **Young & Laramore**, Indianapolis. "Inspired by fashion and inspiring fashion, this reboot will be no different."

"The main difference is that the main stage isn't going to be TV," she said. "This game will be won on Instagram, so brands who are looking for integration should invest in the conversation over on that platform."

Among the luxury brands spotted on the new show are Chanel, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Tod's, Salvatore Ferragamo and Stuart Weitzman.

Similar to the original, emerging brands are also being incorporated throughout *Gossip Girl*'s wardrobe choices.

During the show's first run, costume designer Eric Daman who has returned in the same role on the HBO Max version wove in pieces from then-newcomers 3.1 Phillip Lim, Proenza Schouler and others to balance out luxury's heritage players. Standouts pieces such as a white Marc by Marc Jacobs dress worn by Leighton Meester in the second season premiere and the Yves Saint Laurent Roudy handbag achieved cult status and remain sought after.



Countless luxury brands, including Cartier and Chanel, made appearances on the original Gossip Girl. Image credit: The CW

This time around, Mr. Daman has tapped up-and-coming brands including A.L.C., Bode, Christopher John Rogers, David Koma, LaQuan Smith and Marion Parke. Reflecting a new generation's taste for mixing high-low styles, brands such as Adidas, Madewell and Zara also make appearance.

"*Gossip Girl* presents a unique opportunity for luxury brands to reach a wide audience in a show where the storylines and characters lend themselves specifically to those products," Ms. Douglas said. "The characters in *Gossip Girl* are known for their designer clothes, handbags, shoes, makeup products and more.

"It's a glamorous show that puts the brands the characters love front and center, making it a who's who of luxury fashion brands."

Product placement in the streaming era

In a sign of the times and how content consumption has changed, the *Gossip Girl* reboot has eschewed broadcast television for weekly drops on prestige network HBO's streaming platform, which launched in May 2020. By the end of last year, HBO Max had more than 17 million activations, per **Morning Consult**.

According to Resonate's "2021 State of OTT Report," streaming now accounts for a quarter of all television viewed, with 80 million U.S. consumers increasing their viewership during the pandemic. Cord-cutting has become so popular that 41 percent of respondents now watch television solely through Netflix, HBO, Prime Video, Hulu and Disney+ ([see story](#)).

Product placement is one way that luxury brands can leverage streaming services, since these platforms lack the commercial breaks of broadcast and cable television.

"We are definitely in a new age of advertising," said BEN Group's Ms. Douglas. "Consumers are becoming increasingly ad-averse and more and more companies, including fashion and beauty brands, are looking for ways to reach consumers in ways that don't rely on traditional advertising.

"Product placement is an effective way to do this because it's a win-win-win," she said. "It increases brand awareness, is non-disruptive for viewers and can provide support to entertainment companies, boosting production budgets."

Placements can also happen organically, as television shows weave luxury brands into relevant storylines. Prada, Gucci and Chanel are the most-referenced labels, according to a 2017 analysis from luxury fashion platform Winkelstraat.nl of more than 100 popular TV shows with at least 50 episodes.

At the time, the shows with the most brand mentions *Sex and the City*, *Ugly Betty* and *Gossip Girl* had ceased production and lived on through reruns and streaming ([see story](#)). However, *Sex and the City* is set to follow *Gossip Girl* onto HBO Max with a sequel series, *And Just Like That*, currently in production.

While the medium of television has evolved, many of the guiding principles for product placement still hold true for luxury brands.

"If you're looking for cultural relevancy and association, then the benefits of streaming, while seemingly less tangible, are more effective in the medium- and long-term as they create a halo effect for the brand," said YARD NYC's Mr. Denman. "So it really comes down to objectives, and how you use your owned channels to amplify the placement in a smart manner."

© 2021 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.