

RETAIL

Rapper's deluxe: Why hip hop and luxury are suddenly such a good mix

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Rappers have been singing and wearing luxury fashion and jewelry brands for decades. Now it is time for them to represent some of those. Image credit: Shutterstock

By [Erwan Rambourg](#)

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I grew up in Manhattan in the 70s, a decade that ended with my siblings and me listening to "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang non-stop.

That song came out exactly 42 years ago with hilarious lyrics from one singer boasting he had "more clothes than Muhammad Ali and dressed so viciously." Brands were not mentioned except for car brands but some themes were common to those current day rappers allude to: making it big, going from rags to riches, being the center of attention, notably, with women.

The 1970s' lyrics were certainly lighthearted relative to gangsta rap from the 80s, the East Coast-West Coast rivalry from the 90s, and more recent developments.

Meanwhile, luxury brands have been quoted constantly over the past few years, from Gucci to "Louis," Fendi to Balenciaga, and more and hip-hop artists, such as wealthy consumers, use brands as a vehicle to tell the world that they have succeeded.

While rap put forward luxury names, the brands themselves did not associate much with the artists until recently. Why? Possibly a form of prejudice. More likely: a fear of being exposed to illegal matters. Two of the biggest icons, Tupac Shakur and Biggie, were shot dead in the 90s, and Snoop Dogg was tried for murder and drug possession. Also, most probably a lack of understanding that communities who listen to hip hop likely overlap with those who aspire to purchasing luxury goods.

Hip hop's image and its reach has become way more mainstream and many early influencers have become successful entrepreneurs such as Dr Dre, who sold Beats to Apple for a sweet \$3 billion, Sean Combs, aka P. Diddy, or Jay Z who have built corporate empires with clothing, Champagne and a whole lot more.

Again, Snoop Dogg, who seems to have a Midas touch from 2020 Tokyo Olympics commentator to cofounder of a strawberry-infused California style gin and, of course, Rihanna, in the news this summer for having become a

billionaire, the bulk of her wealth coming from you guessed it her LVMH-managed **Fenty Beauty brand** and not music.

If you like it, then you shoulda put a ring on it

In an interesting twist in which luxury brands wake up and give back, Gucci's latest **Aria collection**, which launches in the fall, was supported by a score including only rap tunes using the word Gucci in the lyrics.

Moreover, Gucci itself has become an adjective for good (as in "How's it going? I'm Gucci, man"), a very telling development on how rap culture can help boost positive connotations.

Tiffany just used the "N.Y. State of Mind" track from New York's own NAS, a 1994 hit that never gets old, in its launch video for its new Knot collection highlighting all the diversity of the brand's roots in the Big Apple, with the hashtag "KnotYourTypicalCity."

Introducing Tiffany Knot

Speaking of New York icons, Tiffany has also announced it was teaming up with rap royalty by engaging Brooklyn-born Jay Z who sold 50 percent of his "Ace of Spades" Champagne to Tiffany's new owner, LVMH and wife **Beyonc as brand ambassadors**.

You thought having the former Louis Vuitton head of international run Tiffany was smart? Having Bernard Arnault's own son look after product and communication was bold? Pinching Cartier's head of design was cunning? Forget it, this is huge. Hands down the Jay Z-Beyonc power couple in entertainment sexy, incredibly affluent and at the same time almost relatable. By putting a ring on them, Tiffany like for many things since **LVMH took over** eight months ago will undoubtedly get powerful traction.

And finally, one of the most written about announcements of the summer for luxury is somewhat related: the purchase by LVMH of a **majority stake** in Virgil Abloh's Off-White brand and the willingness of the group to use his talents around the group.

Mr. Abloh is not a rap artist though he is a gifted DJ and has been close to Kanye West but he brings to luxury what some hip-hop artists might be sought for as well: a sense of the street, the evolving culture in the United States and abroad, and a unique way to capture the current zeitgeist.

Also, Mr. Abloh happens to be one of the rare black executives in an industry which is struggling to gradually be a better mirror of its consumers: diverse, young and plugged in.

Erwan Rambourg has been a top-ranked analyst covering the luxury and sporting goods sectors. After eight years as a marketing manager in the luxury industry, notably for LVMH and Richemont, he is now a managing director and global head of consumer and retail equity research. He is also the author of "Future Luxe: What's Ahead for the Business of Luxury" (2020) and "The Bling Dynasty: Why the Reign of Chinese Luxury Shoppers Has Only Just Begun" (2014).

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