

MARKETING

With Kris Wu and other idols tainted, what is luxury's next China strategy?

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Top-tier idols were powerful marketing tools in China until scandal struck. So what are some smart future strategies for luxury houses? Image credit: Dior

By [Adina-Laura Achim](#)

Until recently, top-tier key opinion leaders (KOLs) and idols were powerful marketing tools in China. But [recent scandals](#) have tarnished the image of some of the most famous brand ambassadors, redirecting a backlash towards luxury brands.

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Instead of building brand equity and increasing brand awareness through KOL marketing, brands have started losing value and market share in China.

As such, marketers want to know what the best luxury marketing strategies are for the China market in the future.

Select the safer idol route

[The South China Morning Post](#) highlights how, in recent years, China's fanatical celebrity culture has become reckless.

Many celebrities had to fight off unwanted attention and obsessive behavior from intrusive fans despite the government's best efforts to limit celebrity worship and crazy fan behavior.

Recent policies meant to curtail this behavior on social media have seen some positive results. But in a country obsessed with celebrities, youngsters and teens will need new idols and role models to follow.

Instead of pop idols and social media celebrities, we foresee Beijing building up the images of party-approved celebrities who maintain squeaky-clean images. These celebrities will use their voices to advocate for China's goals and "party-approved" social causes instead of shamelessly promoting their lavish lifestyles or bizarre behaviors.

Take, for example, the stunning US Open winner, [Emma Raducanu](#). The British teen has taken China by storm with her Mandarin fluency and pride in her Chinese heritage. And her humble nature and immense talent have already caught the attention of [China's state media](#).

"This smiley half-Chinese girl once proudly said it's the Chinese style of inner faith that gave her the confidence,"

press agency Xinhua said. And the *Global Times* quoted a Sina Weibo user who mentioned that Ms. Raducanu's success "can stimulate many young Chinese tennis players to insist on their dreams."

"I am also from Shenyang and proud of Emma's performance at the US Open," Cui, a mom of a three-year-old girl, told the *Global Times*. "I want my daughter to learn tennis to stay healthy, and Emma's story will be a good example for her,"

Diving superstar and Tokyo Olympics gold medal winner, Quan Hongchan, could also become a party-approved celebrity. The 14-year-old, newly-minted star stole hearts with her practical and unassuming nature not to mention how she dedicated her performance to her sick mother.

Considering that the Beijing **2022 Olympic Winter Games** are around the corner, and with the government promoting sports and exercise, selecting party-approved celebrity athletes is a smart strategic move.

Moreover, brands should not underestimate the power of athlete endorsements in China.

Globally, successful partnerships between luxury brands and athletes have proven very effective.

The latest collaboration between **Dior and football club Paris Saint-Germain** is expected to be a hugely successful deal, considering the arrival of top soccer star Lionel Messi to the French team.

On the other hand, Dolce & Gabbana is famous in Italy for its partnership with the Italian National Soccer team. And in the United States, Ralph Lauren has widely been associated with Team USA.

Crackdown on celebrity culture is not unique to China

The **crackdown on celebrity culture** is not unique to China, so brands should not read too much into it.

During Donald J. Trump's presidency, conservative politicians fought liberal pop culture by discrediting Hollywood celebrities. Sometimes, their attempts worked. But in other cases, they backfired. Yet, during those turbulent years, conservatives built up new idols from within their own ranks.

The rapid rise of Lara Trump, Donald Trump Jr., Kayleigh McEnany, Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Hope Hicks shows how, even in the U.S., a ruling party can transform long-devoted aides into celebrities overnight.

Brands can entertain Chinese and U.S. fans through experiential retail

English economist and author Noreena Hertz wrote in "**The Lonely Century: How to Restore Human Connection in a World That's Pulling Apart**" that loneliness pushes people toward the right-wing.

Similarly, China's shy and lonely teens turn to the Internet for entertainment. Consequently, brands should create a connection with these "lonely" demographics, entertaining them with **engaging brand experiences**.

Instead of maintaining idol loyalty, luxury houses should seize the opportunity to encourage brand loyalty. In this way, luxury labels can build healthy and unique relationships with their audiences instead of relying on third parties or unstable celebrities.

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