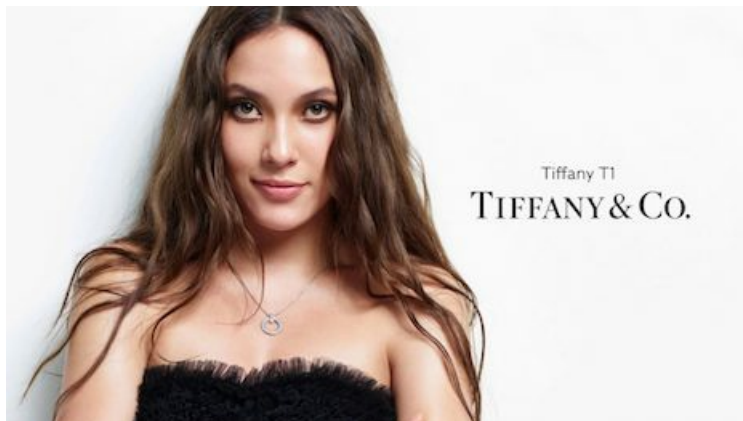


MARKETING

Olympic skier Eileen Gu is China's hottest commodity

February 9, 2022



Skier Eileen Gu is such a unique talent, many believe she will become the "savior" of the scandal-ridden celebrity branding market in China. Image credit: Tiffany & Co.

By [Adina-Laura Achim](#)

In today's celebrity-obsessed age of social media, Eileen Gu is every marketer's dream. She is a freestyle skiing phenomenon with a multicultural background and a squeaky clean image and she also happens to look like a runway model. Plus, it does not hurt that Ms. Gu is smart and speaks fluent Mandarin with a strong Beijing accent.

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It also helps that Ms. Gu, at age 18, this week became the youngest Olympic champion in freestyle skiing at the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, capturing the gold medal in big air.

Premium and luxury brands are already courting her. By now, she has been featured in campaigns for Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co., Victoria's Secret and Este Lauder. But despite her success in the United States, Ms. Gu is setting her sights on China.

Following the 2019 announcement that Ms. Gu would compete for China at the 2022 Winter Olympics, the San Francisco-born teen became one of the hottest marketing commodities on the Chinese mainland.

Per [Bloomberg](#) reports, the announcement delighted Ms. Gu's Chinese fans, who flooded her [Weibo](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts with heart emojis. But Ms. Gu's decision ruffled some feathers in the American skiing community. At the same time, Western media channels wondered if China's newfound celebrity darling would be able to navigate the controversies attached to this year's Winter Olympics.

Despite hazards, no one can argue against Ms. Gu's marketing potential. She single-handedly brought attention to an obscure winter sport in China and inspired legions of Chinese teens to pursue the activity. This surprising turn worked in Beijing's favor, as the Chinese authorities found the perfect ambassador for their ambition to [popularize domestic winter sports](#) practically overnight.

One thing everyone agrees on is that Ms. Gu has a unique marketing appeal.

Mansur Khamitov, an assistant professor of marketing at the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University, told [Jing Daily](#) that Ms. Gu should "be considered a perfect brand ambassador for both American and Chinese brands."

And Bob Dorfman, a sports-marketing analyst and creative director at Pinnacle Advertising in San Francisco, told *Bloomberg* that "Eileen's value is through the roof."

The teen athlete, who many expect to win three gold medals in Beijing, is "shining brightly amid the geopolitical divide in today's fractured world," Mr. Khamitov said. "Eileen exhibits numerous qualities desirable in a brand ambassador. Those include, but are not limited to, perseverance, competence, confidence, dedication, work ethic, talent, strength, thoughtfulness, inclusivity, ambition and drive."

These highly desirable traits have made Ms. Gu a great brand spokesperson, not only for top brand sponsors such as *RedBull*, but also for luxury brands that ink multi-million-dollar sponsorship contracts with celebrities.

Sure enough, the financial benefits that come from partnering with luxury labels such as Tiffany & Co. and Louis Vuitton are far more substantial than many of the deals negotiated by athletes. It also helps that Ms. Gu has a tremendous appeal in China, which has become the most relevant market for luxury brands today.

"Eileen is now i[n] a position to be the Tony Hawk, Kelly Slater or Shaun White of China, as well as the face of action sports in the world's biggest country," said Mike Hanley, head of school at Wy'East Mountain Academy in Oregon, in an email to the *Washington Examiner*.

Considering the crackdown on celebrity culture in China, it is not too far of a stretch to see Ms. Gu as the "savior" of the celebrity branding trend. Luxury brands that found themselves in hot water because of *celebrity scandals* can easily avoid future offenses by partnering with Ms. Gu.

In fact, Ms. Gu has already attracted big sponsors in China.

The New York Post claims she has more than 20 endorsement deals, including collaborations with notable names such as the Bank of China, People's Insurance Company of China, Kohler, China Mobile, Mengniu, Luckin' Coffee and Cadillac in China. But these endorsement deals do not come cheap. According to *campaignasia.com*, a marketing deal with Ms. Gu could reach about \$2.5 million (15 million yuan).

Undoubtedly, Ms. Gu will earn millions if she continues to avoid controversies and win more gold medals at the upcoming Olympic Games.

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