

## What Makes Luxury Brands Win the Hearts of Gen Z on TikTok? An Exploratory Study

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*Research Rational.* TikTok as an emerging short-form video platform was founded by Bytedance in 2016. Only within four years, TikTok has unexpectedly become the most downloaded APP, attracting one billion active users per month. Particularly TikTok is the social media platform for Gen Z (Galer, 2020; Mondalek, 2022). In 2020, all fashion weeks were canceled, or shrank the scale because of the Covid-19 Pandemic; while TikTok kicked off a virtual fashion show which lasted for a month with a powerful lineup of fashion influencers (Lee, 2020). Evidently, TikTok has made incontestable successes in many aspects, and the rise of TikTok has not only changed the social media landscape but also dramatically impacted the fashion domain. It seems that TikTok could be leveraged to win over the hearts of Gen Z consumers, especially luxury brands.

Luxury brands are undoubtedly top leaders in setting trends (Mills, 1999). Today, Gen Z, as a digital native cohort, has shown staggering buying power and unique consumption patterns toward luxury brands (Mabuni, 2017; Nanda, 2020). It is critical for a luxury brand to reach out to Gen Z and win over their hearts to sustain its success for now and future. Social media empowers young consumers, allowing them to freely express their fashion viewpoints, show their fashionable selfies, and even set trends (Reilly & Hawley, 2019). Research has found that young consumers' attention spans are much shorter than those of older generations (Berg & Gornitzka, 2012; Reilly & Hawley, 2019). TikTok seems to fit young consumers' media consumption patterns and offers its users more opportunities for increasing their fashion power using some distinct features including the algorithmic recommendation at For You Page, a set of very easy-to-use digital tools for creating content via mobile phones, and the internet mimic culture (Dewi, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Thus, it is very significant and strategic for luxury brands to figure out how to best utilize TikTok and engage with Gen Z consumers.

Extant research related to TikTok mainly focuses on the unique features and the relevant phenomena of the TikTok platform (Zulli & Zulli, 2020), societal issues of TikTok (Karizat et al., 2021), and the marketing strategy on TikTok (Darmatama & Erdiansyah, 2021; Haenlein et al., 2020). In fact, some luxury brands have successfully captured Gen Z's attention on TikTok. However, little research has been done on fashion brands and their marketing strategies on TikTok; and none has particularly focused how TikTok is leveraged by luxury fashion brands. Therefore, the current research intends to fill the gap through addressing the following two research questions: (1) What are the effective TikTok marketing strategies luxury brands have used to win Gen Z consumers? and (2) How do these successful Luxury brands differentiate themselves on TikTok?

*Research Method.* A case study method is employed (Yin, 1994, 2009). We collect primary data from brands' TikTok accounts to identify, analyze and compare the effective TikTok marketing strategies in terms of establishing brand-consumer engagement across selected luxury brands. Four globally well-known leading luxury fashion brands with successful TikTok marketing outcomes were selected including Louis Vuitton, Ralph Lauren, Gucci, and Burberry.

Studies found that Gen Z consumers on TikTok prefer branded content that is entertaining, authentic, creative, accurate and transparent, and endorsed by diverse individuals rather than only

famous influencers (Dewi, 2021; Ngangom, 2020). Thus, all the video content posted on selected brands' TikTok accounts, the related challenges, and the endorsed users are examined. Through the structured analysis, five dimensions of content strategies, five dimensions of campaign strategies, and the brand profile information are identified and analyzed (see Table 1).

*Findings and Discussion.* Analysis results show that all the selected brands employ content strategies and campaign strategies. However, the selected four brands show differences in the scope and scale of content and campaign strategies and employ different degrees of control over their TikTok content, campaign, and interaction with their audience.

*Content strategies.* All four luxury brands pay attention to increasing their brand awareness on TikTok through brand-generated content including brand image and fashion shows, endorsing influencers, emphasizing the creative and aesthetic visual effect, and using original songs and hashtags, which could not only satisfy

consumers' expected functional and hedonic benefits but also embody availability by giving likes and following brand channels. LV mainly focuses on brand information presentation through the artistic expression way of the fashion show and related content. Ralph Lauren presents its social responsibility and brand innovativeness. Burberry and Gucci try to be trailblazers by creating content that is creative, entertaining, and hunting for novelty. Notably, up to March 17, 2022, LV switched off comments for eight posts and Burberry closed

comments for one post, indicating luxury brands employ close control over their TikTok marketing, even though this might reduce consumer engagement to some degree.

*Campaign strategies.* Initiating challenges is a significant performance indicator of consumer engagement (Mondalek, 2022). LV only uses branded hashtags but does not intend to attract Gen Z users to join and interact, indicating its trade-off between keeping exclusivity and engaging young consumers. Ralph Lauren focuses to maintain its brand positioning by executing hashtag challenges regarding social events like #pinkpony about cancer survivors and #thenature regarding sustainability, which might increase Gen Z consumers' perception of meaningfulness. Burberry and Gucci emphasize engaging with Gen Z through the original challenges and their efforts have been rewarded. So far, expressing your creativity with the #BurberryTB brush has obtained 26.1M views, and the views of relaxed tailoring #GucciLoveParade has reached 56.4M. Burberry focuses on enhancing its creative and innovative brand image and establishing brand-consumer engagement through campaign strategies. Surprisingly, Gucci invited its challenge's attendees to join a real parade that was designed as a fabulous fashion show. Also, Gucci generously supported new talents whose existing followers are less than 100, and it has been the pioneer in engaging with Gen Z through various deliberated challenges on TikTok.

Table 1: Summary of TikTok marketing outcomes and strategies across four luxury brands

Performance Indicator/Brand	LV	Ralph Lauren	Burberry	Gucci
Beginning time	2020-9-1	2019-8-28	2019-5-21	2020-2-7
Amount of posts (by 2022-3-17)	91	251	142	192
Followers	1.5M	345.0K	1M	1.8M
Likes	10.7M	1.3M	7.7M	14.9M
External shopping link	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Content Strategies</b>				
Brand image and Fashion show	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Original music	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Entertainment and/or Discovery	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social responsibilities or activities	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Opening all comments	No (closed 8 posts)	Yes	No (closed 1 post)	Yes
<b>Campaign Strategies</b>				
Using branded hashtags	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Crafting challenges to engage Gen Z	No	No	Yes	Yes
Endorsing other challenges	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Collaborating with Influencers	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Endorsing "new talent" (existing followers less than 2000)	No	No	Yes (1000-2000)	Yes (100-)

All four selected luxury brands strive for engaging young consumers on TikTok through branded content to deliver functional, hedonic, and relational benefits to Gen Z consumers. Also, luxury brands employ different combinations of content and campaign strategies. However, the most successful luxury brand on TikTok, Gucci has won the hearts of Gen Z through crafting challenges, enhancing consumers' positive feelings, and increasing accessibility, indicating luxury brands should balance between controlling exclusivity and increasing accessibility on TikTok.

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