

LIVE-STREAMING AND VIRTUAL SHOWROOMS

REMOTE BUT STILL EXCITING: THE NEW FASHION CHALLENGE

Thanks to advanced multimedia solutions, brands are experimenting with new formats to present and sell collections remotely. Solutions that allow them to reach an ever-wider audience, which turn out to be a big advantage during a health emergency and in times of increased environmental awareness. But fashion is tied to feeling, and distance doesn't help

BY CARLA MERCURIO

The coronavirus emergency has accelerated the existing trend for fashion brands to offer new presentation formats that are increasingly multimedia and virtual. These formats make it possible to reach and engage a considerably wider audience and, at the same time, deal with new concerns linked to sustainability by reducing the impact of travel on Co2 emissions. The potential is enormous and this type of communication can be very effective. The *China we are with you event* organized by the **Camera della Moda** during the Milan womenswear collections allowed Chinese buyers, journalists and consumers to watch shows and specially tailored content, streamed on the Chamber's platform and on **Tencent** and **Weibo**. Sixteen million users watched the catwalk shows on Tencent, and another 9 million on Weibo. This was a godsend for a Fashion Week where 1,000 buyers, journalists and influencers stayed at home. **China we are with you** was only the tip of the iceberg. Brands ran their own digital programs designed to engage buyers, the press and the final audience, including enhanced live-streaming, new initiatives on social networks and on new platforms. In the meantime,

the showrooms either launched or extended their own virtual sales experiences to stem the defections of buyers. Fashion and the web seem to be made for one another. The numbers tell the story. The latest edition of Milan Fashion Week was perhaps a point of no return: **Launchmetrics' Media Impact Value** - an algorithm that gives brands the monetary value of all posts, interactions or articles across channels and markets - rose to \$142.4 million from \$123.7 million last September, with **Gucci, Versace, Prada, Fendi** and **Giorgio Armani** among the top five brands. With 1.11 million messages generated and a global engagement of 88.5 million interactions, Milan Fashion Week was center stage on social networks and on the web, according to **Blogmeter's Fashion Index**. "One of the novelties of this last round of shows was that **TikTok** got involved," said **Irene Ferrario**, Blogmeter Marketing Director. "Some brands, like **Gucci** and **Moncler**, have included it as a touch point in their content strategy. Others have created targeted campaigns: **Prada**, for example, invited American TikToker **Charli D'Amelio** at its fashion show. Thanks to a fan base of 30.7 million followers on TikTok and 8.2 million on **Instagram**, this move contributed to in-



Giorgio Armani held his catwalk show behind closed doors because of the coronavirus outbreak, relying on live streaming

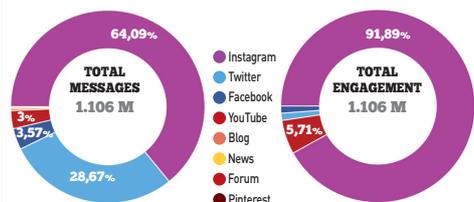
creasing the Milanese maison's fan base." It will be interesting to see how the other brands will exploit this channel during the next round of fashion shows. Among the most talked-about events of this latest fashion week was the decision by **Giorgio Armani** and **Laura Biagiotti** to hold their catwalk shows behind closed doors because of the coronavirus outbreak, relying on live streaming. "The results definitely exceeded expectations," said a spokesperson from Armani's press office. Live streaming is an increasingly strategic visibility vehicle, as long as it is integrated into a well-designed approach, according to **Gucci**: "At the last fashion week, our live-streamed show was available both on the brand's proprietary platforms, the site and app, as well as on other channels such as **Instagram, Youtube, Twitter** and **Weibo**. On Weibo alone, the event received over 20 million views." The imperative for the brand was "digital first": all the assets created for the fashion show, starting from the invitation (a voice message from **Alessandro Michele**) were based on these guidelines. Another must for the "double G" brand was digital amplification: "We worked with influencers including **Gogobi, Teacher Xu, FashionModels, Chrison**

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THE NUMBER OF MESSAGES AND TOTAL ENGAGEMENT RECORDED DURING MILAN FASHION WEEK: INSTAGRAM AND TWITTER RANKED AMONG THE MOST USED PLATFORMS



Source: Blogmeter Fashion Index

and **Dipsy**, to create exclusive content aimed at the Chinese public." The staff at Moncler said it was strategic to focus on content, especially after the brand was forced to cancel the public vesion of its Genius event. This decision led Moncler to take a second look at all its programming across social networks, enriching it with further ideas, in in order to highlight the mega-installations designed for the occasion. While for PR and digital strategists the challenge is to make a streamed version of a catwalk show as exciting as it is in real life, in the showroom it's all about effective tools for long-distance selling. Among the innovators in this field, **Gucci** stands out once again. It has enabled a digital showroom experience that could be used by all buyers and customers usually present in person, letting them access 360-degree views of the collection, zoom in on details and purchase the desired items all with the same tool. Speaking of virtual spaces, **Hugo Boss** also makes use of a digital option for the sale of the **Hugo** line (and soon also for the **Boss** label) which allows the brand to interact with its wholesale partners: "An alternative to traditional orders which embraces all aspects of the collection, starting from the inspiration right through to the selection

of the individual products and making orders," a company spokesperson explained. **Salvatore Ferragamo** entrusted the development of a virtual showroom to Hyphen. "The system generates pre-orders, which are then finalized on the brand's customer management platform," said **Stefano Righetti**, Hyphen founder and CEO. "A very open solution: all the features are also available on an API standard, which allows other developers to integrate easily." But it doesn't end there. "Companies in the U.S. and Switzerland are working with important backers to find a way for viewers to experience tactile sensations digitally. These models in the future could be easily integrated into our platform." The multi-brand showrooms have also gone digital: starting from Pre-fall, the **Riccardo Grassi** showroom has devised sales support systems for the team via **WhatsApp**, **WeChat**, e-mail and **Dropbox**, suggesting images and videos targeted for buyer's retail customers. "We have solutions equipped with musical backgrounds to recreate the showroom atmosphere, which show details, processes and fabrics. They have transfor-

med our kids into videomakers," said **Matteo Falcone**, the showroom manager. "With Chinese buyers, the preferred communication channel is WeChat, which contains content, payment methods, social interactions, e-commerce experiences and so on in a single environment." **Massimo Bonini**, owner of the eponymous Milanese showroom with an outpost in New York, has also equipped himself for long-distance selling: "We prepare videos with models and detailed line sheets, which we send by Dropbox to our customers. An approach that will be increasingly strategic, and not only in times of emergency. In the United States, for example, no customer actually orders in showrooms. The buyer comes to visit us, looks at the collection and then has videos and line sheets sent over to be viewed at leisure. This trend is going to catch on in Milan." **Francesco Casile** of Milan's **Casile & Casile** showroom did everything he could to help customers physically go to the showroom during Fashion Week. But it also got organized for

LIVE-STREAMING NEW CHANNELS SOCIAL MEDIA VIRTUAL SHOWROOMS: FASHION IS INCREASINGLY ONLINE, AND ENGAGEMENT SURGES

those who couldn't: "We worked day and night in order to get ready to work remotely, and received 28 orders (some of which were important) from customers who did not come to Milan." The baton now passes over to trade fairs: forced to postpone their dates, they will have to adapt to the multimedia trend.

Pitti Immagine led the way, when nine years ago it lauched a digital platform called **e-pitti.com** offering for **Pitti Uomo**, **Pitti Bimbo** and **Pitti Filati**, capable of putting exhibitor and retailer directly in contact. CEO **Raffaello Napoleone** says the format has evolved: "The online event used to start after the physical event closed. But now thanks to technology, about 60% of our exhibitors present collections on this channel days ahead of the event." While virtual solutions multiply, one thing always remains the same: fashion, especially on the luxury end, must always appeal to the emotions. This calls for people to be present in person. "We make orders remotely," said **Federico Giglio** of the Giglio boutiques in Palermo. "This time there are no big problems, because 90% of the work had already been done. But it is impossible to imagine experiencing the fashion we sell without savoring it in person." ■