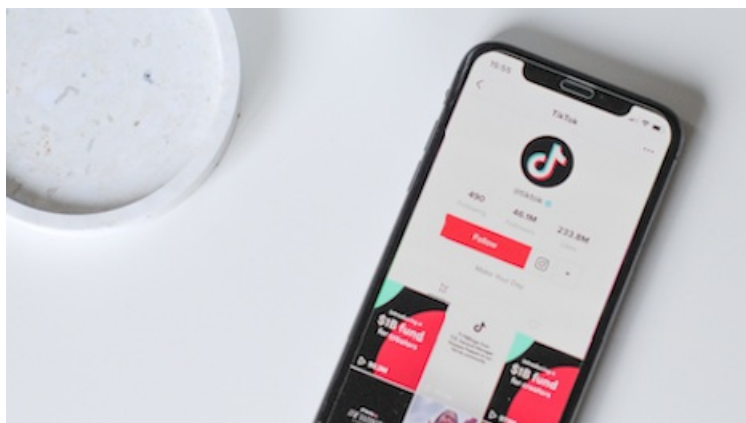MARKETING

Year on TikTok: Trends, brands that drove engagement

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Throughout 2021, brands have tapped the power of TikTok to reach audiences in candid, authentic ways. Image credit: Unsplash

By NORA HOWE

Short-form video sharing platform TikTok has emerged as today's birthplace of online trends and movements, and a viral video can make or break a brand.

From #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt to dance challenges, there are ample opportunities for brands to engage with consumers through the short-form video platform. According to a new report from TikTok, brands such as Gucci and Ralph Lauren found success on the platform in 2021 through partnerships or leveraging user-generated content.

This report looks at engagement specifically in the United States.

Year on TikTok
The TikTok community has effectively convinced brands to "make TikToks, not ads." In fact, a recent study found that 56 percent of users and 67 percent of creators feel closer to brands they see on TikTok, particularly when they publish authentic, unpolished content.

The impact of the #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt hashtag, which has more the 7 billion views, reaches well beyond the platform. The popularity of products within the TikTok community, some of which rose to stardom overnight, is evidently reflected in sales.

In August, TikTok creator Trinidad Sandoval posted her daily skincare routine using Peter Thomas Roth's Instant FIRMx eye cream. Within days of her video going viral, the product was sold out online across major beauty retailers, and the brand estimated that the number of sales in one week following the TikTok was equivalent to six months.

As younger consumers increasingly purchase gateway luxury items, Gucci nail polish also became a popular item on the platform under the #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt hashtag (see story).

@afashionnerd##tiktokmademebuyit ##gucci
##nails ##guccinailpolish @gucci ep 985 The

Hustle - Van McCoy

Going beyond popular items, brands legitimately listen to product reviews and have made changes based on the organic conversations of the TikTok community.

Clothing brand Gap brought back a vintage brown hoodie sweatshirt, more than 10 years after stopping production, when TikTok creator Barbara Kristofferson organically used #gaphoodie on a video featuring the sweatshirt that reached more than 8.2 million views.

With access to TikTok's suite of in-app effects and advertising tools, brands can easily engage with and inspire the community by co-creating campaigns.

As the official outfitter of Team USA, Ralph Lauren partnered with TikTok for a custom-branded effect to celebrate the Tokyo Olympics. The hashtag #RLxTeamUSA garnered more than 52.6 million views and encouraged users to show off their patriotic outfits.

However, brands do not have to start trends to get involved in the action.

Italian fashion house Gucci jumped on a trend that TikTok user Morgan Presley started, #GucciModelChallenge, where she describes elements commonly found in the brand's editorial ads while donning whatever she had in her closet that best matched the narrative (see story). To date, the hashtag has 10.6 million views.

Further, do-it-yourself (DIY) apparel has become a major trend on the platform, and after singer Harry Styles was shown wearing JW Anderson's Colourblock Patchwork Cardigan, TikTok user Live Huffman created her own version of it and posted the video, inspiring others to do the same.

> @lilbittylivieI made myself a knock off of harry styles' jw anderson cardigan lmao ##fyp ##foryou ##foryoupage ##harrystyles original sound - Liv

In response, the British brand's creative director Jonathan Anderson released the pattern and a tutorial on how to make it online. The hashtag #HarryStylesCardigan has now reached more than 86 million views (see story).

Going live
TikTok Live allows creators to connect with the community in real-time, and brands have found success by using this feature to engage their audiences to comment, ask questions and connect with those behind the brands.

For example, to promote the release of *The Kissing Booth 3*, star Joel Courtney hosted a livestream on Netflix's official TikTok account where he reacted to the film trailer for the first time. By showcasing this candid moment, Netflix created a live, intimate experience for its film.

As livestreaming enters the ecommerce game, these tools will become more important as brands look to utilize the TikTok platform and its massive reach.

In August 2020, market researcher Forrester forecasted that livestreaming commerce is set to reach $100 billion in China by 2023, up from $34 billion in 2019, and other Asia-Pacific markets are set to follow (see story).

As livestreaming becomes an increasingly popular practice in China, Western labels and retailers are catching on to the tactic as a means of driving real-time interactions with consumers.

TikTok first began testing its liveshopping capabilities earlier this year at a time when social media started to move in a more transactional direction.

Features such as allowing users to buy products within the app, interact with influencers and their product affiliate links and purchase products from livestreaming events are part of this shift (see story).