BODYGUARD

Safeguarding prestige:
Exploring the impact of social media moderation for luxury brands

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Introduction

The social media landscape in the world of luxury brands

Luxury brands are leveraging social media to engage with consumers more than ever before.

Far from just promoting new products, brands in the luxury sector are creating entire digital worlds on their social channels, with some attracting hundreds of millions of followers in the process.

Social media has become a virtual storefront for luxury brands: a place where they can showcase their products in the most aspirational settings, create a sense of exclusivity, and cultivate customer loyalty.

But in the digital age, one of the biggest threats to the painstakingly-maintained reputations of luxury brands is user generated content (UGC).

Even the most exclusive brands can't escape the presence of spam, scams, illicit links, and toxic messages left by bots and users on their social media pages. And its potential impact on brand desirability and customer acquisition shouldn't be underestimated.

78% of consumers say that they 'strongly or somewhat agree' that compared to a year ago, a brand's social media presence has a larger impact on whether or not they trust that brand[1]. Amongst Gen-Z, the figure was 88%[1]. And 58% of social media users say that following a brand has a moderate to high impact on their purchasing decisions[2].

Whilst the technological era may have opened the floodgates to the threat of UGC on social media, it could also provide the answer: moderation. By moderating content on their social channels, it's possible for luxury brands to reap the benefits that come from engaging with their audience online, whilst ensuring their reputation stays intact. This white paper aims to establish whether social media moderation really makes this enviable position achievable for luxury brands.

It explores the extent of the issue of social media toxicity for luxury brands, identifying the most problematic and prevalent types of content, and examines what impact—if any—moderation has on key performance indicators, such as community growth and positive engagement.

By shining a spotlight on the intersection of UGC, brand reputation, and the potential for moderation to mitigate the associated risks, we aim to establish the real value of social media moderation for luxury brands and answer their most pressing question: is it worth the investment?

The social media shopping revolution

Luxury brands have long recognized the power of social media as a tool for sharing information, creating brand equity, and influencing purchasing behavior.

In 2023, social commerce generated revenue of around $570 billion[3], and that figure is expected to grow. In fact, it's estimated that by 2028, the market will surpass $1 trillion[3].

70% of people who follow a brand on social media say they plan to purchase from them, either soon or in the future, and 59% have already made a purchase[2]. And it's increasingly becoming the shopping channel of choice for Gen-Z and Millennials, who also happen to have overtaken boomers as the biggest buyer demographic for the luxury market[4].

When surveyed, 43% of Millennials and Gen-Z consumers said they had purchased directly from a social media app in the last three months[5]. And if a Gen-Z social media user follows a brand, they are twice as likely to make a purchase compared to other generations[2].

Whilst Gen-Z and Millennials lead the way as social media shoppers, across every generation consumers are turning to social media to find new products. 1 in 4 now say they prefer to discover new products through social media over any other channel[5].

$570 bn

Generated revenue
in 2023

$1 tn

Expected revenue
in 2028
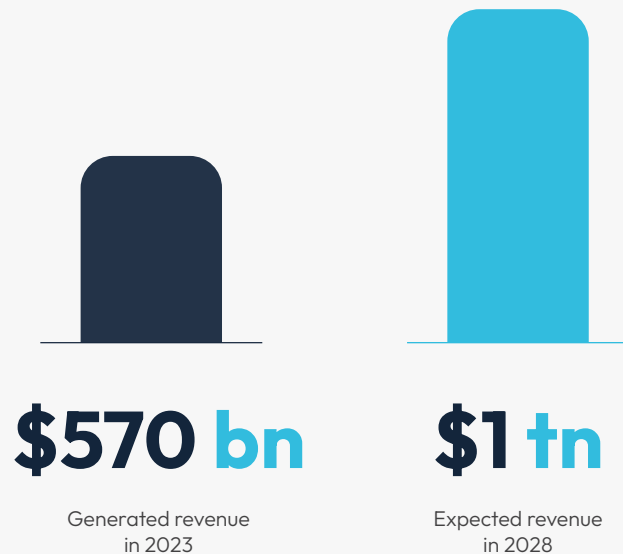
59%

Of users have already made a purchase on social media

The changing path to purchase: What's influencing the new generation of social shoppers?

The way young consumers are finding and purchasing products has changed, and so has what motivates them to buy. Gen-Z consumers cite a brand having an 'active community' as one of the most important factors when it comes to what influences them to make a purchase[5]. And they want brands to have a voice, beyond simply self-promotion. 1 in 2 Gen-Z consumers feel that brands should take a stance on social issues[5], with racial injustice and climate change named as the two most important topics.

As social shoppers scroll their favorite platforms to find the next 'must-have' bag or pair of shoes, the journey they take from initial research to clicking the 'buy' button has also evolved. Live streams, which luxury brands have increasingly used to showcase new collections during some of the world's biggest fashion weeks, have become a strong indicator of buying behavior. And that presents its own set of challenges.

One survey found that 71% of social media users[6] who have watched a live stream had made a purchase before through social media. With comments and interactions unfolding in real time during live events, there is a palpable need for luxury brands to ensure viewers aren't exposed to toxic content that could trigger them to leave, or deter them from making a purchase.

With a tech-savvy, community-seeking, socially-conscious consumer base, social media presents a golden opportunity for luxury brands to engage their customers like never before. But it is not without risk. UGC is a fundamental part of social media engagement: and it is not always positive. By giving users the freedom to interact with a brand and each other through comments, mentions, and in other ways, luxury brands walk a tightrope between elevating their sales and status through authentic community engagement, and leaving themselves open to reputational damage by the very same interactions.

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A double-edged sword: The reputational risks of user-generated content in the new era of social shopping

When it is positive, UGC can be one of the most compelling endorsements for a luxury brand, having a significant impact on brand awareness and sales.

87% of businesses report increased sales thanks to UGC, and 92% say it increases brand awareness[7]. Other studies show that advertising has half the impact of UGC[7] when it comes to influencing purchasing decisions.

But UGC also has the potential to cause significant damage to brand reputation and desirability. Bodyguard's own research found that 40% of social media users would stop engaging with a brand's page the very first time they encountered toxic content.

Of businesses report increased sales thanks to UGC **87%**

Of businesses say UGC increases brand awareness **92%**

Of social media users disengage the first time they encounter toxic content **40%**

With a booming market and so much at stake, it's vital luxury brands control UGC on their social channels to make sure that it remains an asset, not a hindrance, to sustained social media success.

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Social media moderation: a nice-to-have or must-have for luxury brands?

In recent years, social media moderation has emerged as a viable solution for luxury brands that want to control the narrative on their social media, whilst cultivating genuine connections with their customers.

It's important to note: moderation should never equal censorship. Consumers have the right to express their honestly held opinions online, even if that means a brand comes under scrutiny or is criticized.

But brands are equally entitled to make sure that misinformation, fake news, spam, scams, and other kinds of toxic content don't pollute their social media pages. It's not just about protecting brand reputation: it's about recreating the high-quality experience luxury consumers have with a brand in the real world, in their online space.

|	
Spam	**35%**
Hateful comments	**15%**
Illicit links	**12%**
Scam	**5%**
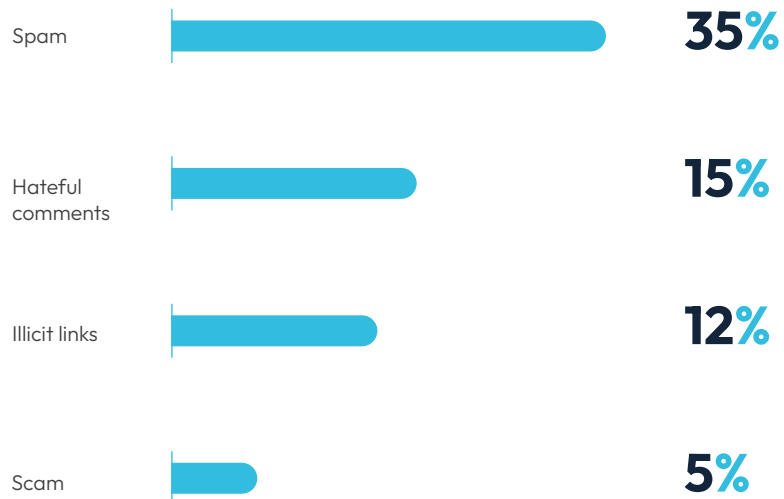
Moderation as a means for safeguarding reputation

As much as UGC can be an asset to luxury brands, it can also cause lasting damage to how they are perceived, and ultimately, to business success.

With 73% of consumers saying that the most attractive brands are those that increase their sense of security and safety[8], creating an online environment that does just that should be paramount. That's where moderation comes in.

From August 2023 to August 2024, Bodyguard analyzed 2.6m comments for luxury brands across their social media channels, with an average of 46m followers across accounts.

2.6 m
Comments analyzed

August 2023   August 2024
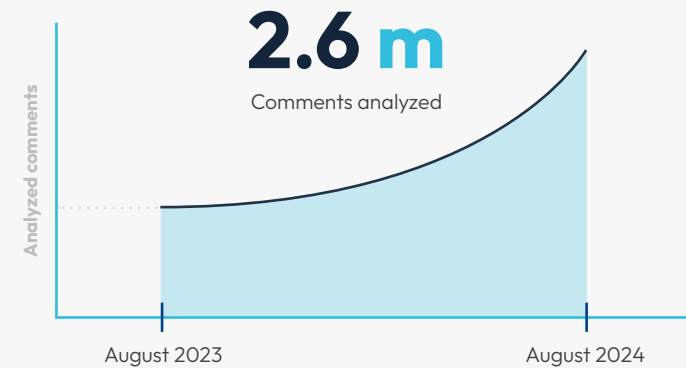
During this time, 107k comments were flagged as toxic and removed—around 4%—which included toxic content like spam, scams, illicit links, and hateful comments such as racism and LGBTQIA+phobia.

The three most frequently occuring types of toxic content for luxury brands were spam, hateful comments, and illicit links. Of these, spam posed the biggest problem, accounting for 35% of all comments removed. In the luxury sector, where brands succeed and fail on their ability to create and maintain an illusion of prestige, the presence of spam seriously undermines this carefully crafted image.

63k comments analyzed belonged to custom classifications: specific categories created by Bodyguard at the request of brands to meet their exact needs. From animal welfare to customer complaints, or more positively, customer satisfaction, these comments represent unique, brand-sensitive subjects, which are of special interest or importance to a brand: and sometimes need to be acted upon quickly.

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## How moderation can safeguard reputation

Time and again, studies show that positive engagement on a brand's social media pages is a huge driver for purchasing.

Half of Gen-Z consumers name "good vibes" as one of the most appealing aspects of a brand's online presence[2]. And 53% say[2] that a brand responding to direct questions and comments in a timely way – which moderation enables – is most appealing to them.

Bodyguard data shows luxury brands that use moderation have +7% more positive engagement on their social channels than the industry average. The same brands saw a +2% increase in positive engagement on their social media after using Bodyguard, compared to before.

31%
Industry average

VS

38%
Bodyguard clients
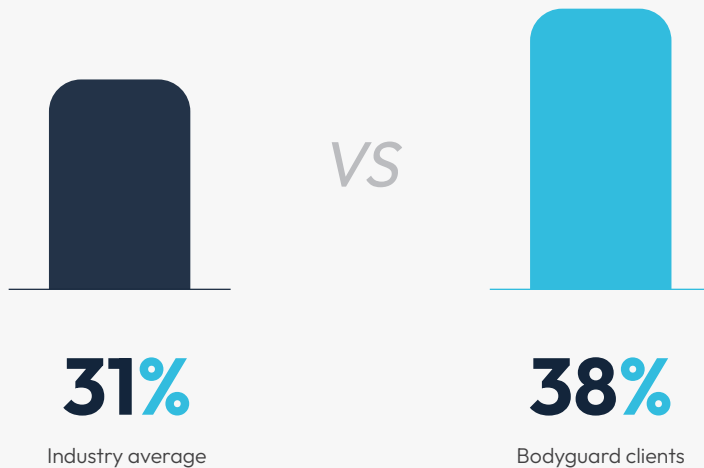
90% of people commenting on our luxury clients' pages were new authors, meaning this was the first interaction they had had with the brand, and indicating a strong and growing brand awareness.

 # 90% New authors
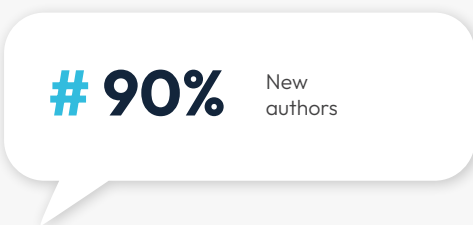
Mitigating online crises through moderation

Luxury brands are known for pushing boundaries and eliciting strong reactions to their creative campaigns.

Over the last few years, some of the world's biggest luxury brands have been embroiled in controversy. And when a brand finds itself at the center of a PR storm, comments on social media often fuel the fire, exacerbating the problem and having a lasting impact on brand perception.

Bodyguard analyzed the data of a luxury brand who experienced a PR crisis over three days in 2024. 28% of all comments across their social media channels during that time were related to the crisis.

In three quarters of the social media channels Bodyguard protected, follower count was not impacted during the crisis. In one quarter of sources, follower count increased over the specified period.

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Conclusion

The meteoric rise of social media has signaled a seachange for luxury brands.

In this new era, where social media is crucial not just for generating brand awareness but also for driving sales, finding the perfect balance between fostering community interaction, sharing captivating content, and protecting brand integrity, is vital.

Social media is a volatile, ever-shifting landscape with the power to elevate a brand's reputation—or tarnish it. It's in this high-stakes environment that moderation has emerged as a critical pillar for luxury brands, always working behind the scenes to protect brand integrity whilst opening up new avenues for growth.

Luxury brands that harness the power of moderation benefit from social media pages that are free of brand-damaging toxic content, experience heightened positive engagement, and can navigate online crises more easily.

For all these reasons, moderation is no longer just a 'nice-to-have'; it's the foundation of any successful social media strategy. Moderation doesn't just protect a luxury brand's reputation—it propels it to new heights in a crowded and fiercely competitive market. And ultimately, it can dictate whether a brand thrives or withers in one of its most critical new sales channels.

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AI-powered social media monitoring and moderation solution. We blend AI and human oversight to swiftly detect and remove toxic content, ensuring a safer online environment. Our plug-and-play solution safeguards brand image, fosters positive user experiences, and offers 24/7 protection across all platforms. Alongside advanced moderation services, Bodyguard provides actionable insights that help brands better understand their audiences, refine strategies and engage more effectively with their communities.
To learn more about Bodyguard, visit: www.bodyguard.ai

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Methodology

Between August 2023 and August 2024, Bodyguard analyzed over 2.6m comments on social media for our clients in the luxury brand sector, and removed 107k of them.

For the purposes of this report, we took data directly from the Bodyguard dashboard for the same luxury clients and same duration, to find:

• The average positive engagement rate and the industry average.
• The average follower count across all social media platforms.
• The top four toxic content classifications, based on the number of comments received.
• The percentage of new authors commenting on analyzed posts.

To give context of the wider social media shopping and consumer landscape, we used verified data provided by industry-leading social media marketing and monitoring tools.

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whitepaper