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# BLACKBOOK

INDIA'S LUXURY INSIDER

ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

## Power-packed

BlackBook presents exclusive, authored articles by market leaders on the future of Indian luxury. Artist Michelle Yohan Poonawalla writes on what a consumer wants



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CONSUMER SPEAK

## “Consumers will prefer brands that provide efficient and flexible service solutions”

The well-travelled, aware and conscious buyers will seek slightly more affordable and environment-friendly brands in the future

*Michelle Poonawalla*  
By Michelle Poonawalla

The growth of India's luxury market is being driven by aspirational, young professionals who have more spending power than ever before. While India has always had a host of amazing home-grown brands, especially in jewellery, I think there is an increased awareness of international brands, thanks to social media platforms and influencers. Everyone can see what his or her icons are wearing, doing or buying and mimic that.

### Individualisation

I think the luxury market is also becoming more individualised, a concept that will further enhance in the future. Brands such as Goyard are letting consumers customise products directly in their stores. Monogramming is big too. A unique story is what the consumers of tomorrow shall seek. He/she would want to own something, which reflects his/her personality, tells an exciting tale and isn't replicated ever.

Even brands like Louis Vuitton are increasingly showing limited editions of products, created by artists. For me, as an artist, it is great to see more of these limited-edition customisations, wherein the brands or consumers work with a designer or a craftsman to make limited-edition pieces. Earlier these collaborations were limited to prominent, international artists such as Takashi Murakami, who designed for Louis Vuitton, or even Andy Warhol, joining forces with Yves Saint Laurent in the '70s. However, this is increasingly coming to India and will only grow in the coming years. This year, a fabulous young artist, Ritika Merchant, from TARQ gallery, in Mumbai, collaborated with Chloé. Perhaps, even more recognisably, Subodh Gupta worked with Absolut to design a custom Vodka bottle for the brand. Even BMW shows its Art Cars (painted by Andy Warhol and Frank Stella) at the India Art Fair, in Delhi, every year. Such projects raise the profile of Indian designers and artists while making Indian consumers feel that they are part of the brand.

### A sense of belonging

Brands will have to work on building this sense of belonging among consumers and invest more in understanding their consumers better. For instance, if luxury automobile brands want more women to drive their cars, they need not change the cars' designs, but design their promotion campaign to please women drivers. I believe, both, men and women appreciate the speed, good make and comfortable interiors. Brands must

“Privacy is paramount. I don't think consumers would want brands to track their preferences”

engage their women clients with compelling stories, which are not male-centric. Don't exclude us by giving us something different. Make us feel included and special. The same goes for luxury watches, luxury houses or any other sectors, which are currently dominated by men.

### International collaborations

Consumers today are well travelled, more conscious of what they are spending on and know what they want. I think in the future there'll be more room for slightly more affordable brands in the market. There is still a lack of accessibility for some brands, which people may be familiar with (online or on social media). It would be great to see more global brands coming in, so there's more to choose from. High-end brands' penetration into tier-II cities is another thing that big labels must work on.

I would also like to see more collaborative products make it to India. As compared to art, however, there is a lot more movement in the luxury retail sector. I wish to see the same amount of international action in the Indian art market as well. It would be wonderful to see major international galleries like Pace or Lisson Gallery showing in India regularly.

### Efficient and flexible service

If I had one tip to give to luxury brands coming to India, I think it would be about service. Indian consumers have always been very spoilt when it comes to service, whether in hotels, at homes or in stores. If consumers are spending big money, they expect impeccable customer service at the point of sales and afterwards, and flexibility. Someone might want something delivered the same day, or a couple of options brought to their house to try on. The brands must accommodate these demands.

The Indian consumer does not want to hear someone say no! Moreover, privacy is paramount. There is much talk about using Artificial Intelligence to track a consumer's tastes. This, in my opinion, will not be appreciated by buyers of luxury. Nobody likes to be trailed or feel that someone else knows too much about them.

Overall, however, I would say that the market is growing, and I think this is a good time for brands to come to India. If they can offer the right products at the right prices and great service, their businesses will do well. ■

*Artist and aesthete Michelle Yohan Poonawalla is a connoisseur of fine life.*