

MARKETING

Mythbusting Gen Z: The truth behind this buzzing generation

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Brands and retailers can reach Gen Z by seamlessly integrating the digital and physical channels while using messaging that resonates. Image credit: Nordstrom

By NORA HOWE

Gen Z is a hot topic, especially when it comes to fashion, social platforms and digitalization, but with widespread talk comes a few misconceptions about the cohort.

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As the first generation to grow up fully immersed in technology, Gen Z is consistently under fire by older generations for its plugged-in, social media-first mentality. However, during a session at the *Vogue Business* and Klarna Gen Z Forum on Jan. 27, Gen Z and millennial fashion content creators dispelled some of the myths surrounding young people today, from their reliance on digital to their consumption of fast fashion, and how brands can better serve this group.

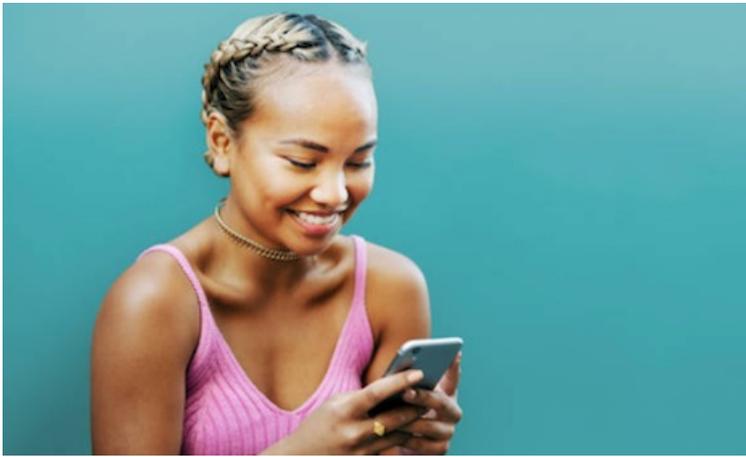
"What brands need to realize, especially older luxury houses, is that, at its core, luxury means the finest quality of design and material," said [Alexandra Hildreth](#), fashion writer, producer and TikTokker.

"What this means for reaching younger generations is if you have a good enough product, everything that comes after that is organic," she said. "If the emotion can remain organic behind the creative direction, that is the most effective way to market towards younger people."

Setting the record straight

Gen Z is a digital-only generation, argued *Vogue Business* trends editor and moderator Lucy Maguire.

Technology has been readily available to them throughout their lives, so younger people are naturally inclined towards online and can easily navigate the digital space. However, the use of digital is a spectrum some individuals are chronically online while others reject it.



Gen Z appreciates in-person shopping, but also finds more flexibility and accessibility with ecommerce. Image credit: Getty

Younger consumers effectively strike a balance between the digital and physical channels, and when it comes to luxury purchases, they actually prefer physical, in-person experiences.

"When I was entering the fashion world, there was no way my first few major investment pieces were going to be purchased online," Ms. Hildreth said. "I remember going to the Galleria in Milan, down into the bank vault, to buy my first Prada bag where I spent almost everything in my bank account.

"Experiences like that are so special, though, which is why there remains such a strong emphasis on customer service with luxury brands," she said. "That being said, when it comes to online shopping, there is a much broader opportunity to discover a specific personal style."

Acknowledging Gen Z's interest in engaging in the physical environment and their ability to engage online, brands should find new ways to bring digital connection to real life, rather than just posting to their digital accounts.

Short-form video entertainment through platforms such as TikTok has led many people to accuse Gen Z of being incapable of focusing on anything for more than 30 seconds.

Also, considering the internet was conceived in the early 1980s, attention spans for consuming information have been shortening well before Gen Z was a factor.

"The issue with short-form content, and where I think the attention span myth comes from, is that there is not a lot of room for nuanced discussion with this type of content," said [Mandy Lee](#), trend forecaster, fashion writer and TikToker. "With longer-form content, you can really dive into the topic."

While TikTok is growing at an accelerated pace, and may ultimately surpass other platforms, Gen Z still gravitates toward YouTube for beauty tutorials, retail hauls and more.

"I personally like longer-form content because it allows me to grasp finer details and elements of someone's experience," said Danni Gallagher, Depop seller and shop manager of [@DannisGarden](#). "I want to see everything you got from a shopping trip!"

Gen Z is often seen as driven by fleeting trends and fast fashion, but this generalization has its complexities.

On one hand, the cohort is highly environmentally and socially motivated, but on the other hand, data shows that Amazon is Gen Z's favorite retailer and fast-fashion retailer Shein came out on top on Black Friday last year.

"Everyone wants to participate in new trends," Ms. Gallagher said. "So, unfortunately, fast fashion becomes more accessible, both financially and from a size-inclusive perspective."



With circular fashion and resale on the rise, Depop grew 100 percent in 2020. Image credit: Image credit: Depop

Resale platforms play a key role in combating this phenomenon ([see story](#)), however, offering consumers ways to participate in emerging trends without compromising the environment and finding styles that work for them.

One major issue with the "fleeting trends" argument, according to the panelists, is that it assumes Gen Z is responsible when it is the industry itself that has accelerated the trend cycle. Consumers are simply following the calendar.

"Everything seems to be cycling back all at once we have the 60s and 70s, Y2K and more that are all relevant today," Ms. Lee said. "Eventually, we are not going to have anything to reference because everything is cycling so quickly the trend cycle will inevitably implode and people will be forced to look within and find their true style."

Collabs are key

In reaching Gen Z, luxury brands must remember to hone in on specific subsets rather than trying to cast a wide net when launching collaborations.

Earlier this month, Kering-owned fashion house Balenciaga partnered with Yeezy Gap to embark on a new creative journey Yeezy Gap Engineered by Balenciaga.

With Kanye West, who now formally goes by Ye, at the helm, Yeezy Gap brings together his creative vision and the values and history of an iconic American brand, Gap. In collaboration with Balenciaga creative director Demna Gvasalia, Yeezy Gap Engineered by Balenciaga aims to carry out both designers' visions for design ([see story](#)).

Within the last two weeks, Spanish fashion label Loewe unveiled its second installment of an ongoing collaboration with Japan's Studio Ghibli. The new capsule collection designed by creative director Jonathan Anderson honors the classic Spirited Away, an animated film directed by Hayao Miyazaki that celebrates loyalty and friendship ([see story](#)).

"Loewe stayed true to their brand identity by making their bags like they normally do, but added in a fun, engaging element," Ms. Lee said. "They brought in people to put them on a radar they might not have otherwise been on."

"Collaborations provide a fun opportunity for brands to reach a new audience."

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