

## The Debrief | Gen Z Isn't Buying Luxury's Story

Prices are up, hype is out and vintage is in. BoF correspondents Lei Takanashi and Jessica Kwon join The Debrief to explain why Gen Z is drifting away from luxury — and how brands can win them back.

By Lei Takanashi, Jessica Kwon, Sheena Butler-Young, Brian Baskin



### Background:

Luxury is struggling to connect with Gen Z, a cohort raised on TikTok and YouTube who research before they buy, shop vintage and resale as a first stop, and question whether soaring prices match product quality. While Millennials fuelled the last luxury boom via streetwear crossovers and scarcity-led drops, today's younger shoppers are more value-driven and sceptical of polished brand theatre. In-store, rigid service models feel alien to a generation used to conversational creators.

This episode of The Debrief explores what “worth it” means to Gen Z and how brands can earn it. Greater transparency on materials and craftsmanship, content that feels real rather than aspirational, and participation in the second-hand ecosystem will be critical to rebuilding trust and lifetime value with younger consumers.

### Key Insights:

Gen Z are not tuning out of fashion, they're interrogating it. As BoF correspondent Lei Takanashi puts it, “[Gen Z] are so savvy. They can just look up what the Louis Vuitton bag is made of and see it's actually canvas... Should I really spend a thousand dollars on that? Is there an alternative?” The backlash is philosophical as well as financial.

Editorial apprentice (and Gen Zer) Jessica Kwon says there's a pervasive idea that luxury conglomerates are just trying to squeeze as much profit as possible. “There is real ire and resentment among Gen Z around price hikes. I think we're a generation that cares a lot about value for dollar,” she says. When the price, materials and narrative do not align, younger shoppers default to vintage, resale or opting out.

Price justification starts with transparency and proof. “Whether it's a thousand-dollar handbag or a \$100 candle, you have to explain why luxury costs what it costs, that there's this craftsmanship and heritage,” says Takanashi. But storytelling alone will not close the sale. “Even then, it's just so hard to convince that customer that craftsmanship is worth the money. You also have to play into their cultural interests and what they're passionate about.” That means moving beyond heritage talking points to show living communities, real processes and credible creatives who make the brand feel current.





Digitally native Gen Z want real content, not polished marketing campaigns. “Our generation grew up on YouTube, ‘how to build an outfit 101’ – that’s how we got our style advice, not from magazines,” says Kwon, which is why they still “look to influencers and social media for trend analysis.” The tone matters as much as the channel. Takanashi argues that content should “feel real, like an unboxing, not a glossy marketing campaign. ... Something that just feels like anyone could make it.” The formats that win are lo-fi, conversational and useful, with creators who will praise and critique in the same breath.

Many first encounters with luxury now happen through second-hand, so brands need to embrace that ecosystem and give clear on-ramps back to full price. The product and the pitch must both feel meaningful. Kwon says Gen Z still wants “a very beautiful story” and to “feel like they’re a part of a movement.”

