

Gen Z brings dupe culture to new heights

Article

The trend: Social media is bringing dupe culture to new heights, as Gen Zers whose incomes have not yet caught up to their passion for luxury and premium products look for affordable ways to stay on trend.

- Roughly one-third of makeup consumers ages 18 to 34 (33%) and 25 to 34 (35%) bought a dupe due to something they saw on social media, per Mintel.
- **71% of Gen Zers say they sometimes or always buy cheaper versions of name-brand products**, according to a survey by [Business Insider](#) and YouGov.

The opportunity: The search for dupes is creating an opening for affordable brands and retailers, like **e.l.f. Beauty** and **Target**, to insert themselves into the cultural conversation and drive sales.

- E.l.f. Beauty in particular made selling beauty dupes a big business. The company's versions of popular products like **Rare Beauty's** liquid blush and **Dior's** lip oil—alongside consistent virality on **TikTok**—are helping to push it closer to the **\$1 billion sales mark**.
- Target's private label perfume line, **Fine'ry**, is winning over shoppers, who say the brand's scents resemble fragrances from **Tom Ford** and **Baccarat** but at a fraction of the price.
- And discount retailers like **Trader Joe's**, **Aldi**, and **Dollar Tree** are looking to capture a larger share of discretionary spending by selling knock-off versions of products from popular brands like **Clinique** and **Glow Recipe**.

The big takeaway: While some brands are wary of the potential sales hit, dupe culture can benefit the “dupee,” as most shoppers associate oft-copied brands with positive sentiments like “fashionable,” “trendy,” and “elite,” **Ellyn Briggs**, brands analyst for Morning Consult, told The Guardian. Brands like **lululemon athletica** and **Olaplex** even leaned into dupe culture as a tool to drive awareness and customer acquisition.

- Lululemon's “Dupe Swap” event in Los Angeles last year attracted over 1,000 people, half of whom were new customers, the company said; it is now considering bringing the swap to more markets.
- Olaplex paid TikTok influencers to hawk “Oladupé” as part of a campaign which both nodded to consumers' obsession with dupes and demonstrated what makes Olaplex products impossible to replicate.

The success of both initiatives shows that brands that embrace dupe culture have a good chance of staying top-of-mind with consumers, and eventually convincing them to upgrade to the real thing.

Types of Retailers US Gen Z Consumers Shop Most Frequently, March 2023

% of respondents

Discount/off price retailers (T.J. Maxx, Marshalls, Kohl's, Walmart, Target, etc.)

48%

Dollar/variety stores (Dollar General, Family Dollar, etc.)

25%

Specialty retailers (Express, Abercrombie, Best Buy, Apple, Sephora, Bath and Body Works, etc.)

24%

Fast fashion retailers (Shein, Zara, Uniqlo, H&M, etc.)

22%

Department stores (Macy's, Dillard's, JCPenney, Bloomingdales, etc.)

21%

Thrift/second-hand (The RealReal, ThredUp, etc.)

13%

Peer-to-peer (Etsy, Depop, etc.)

11%

Facebook Marketplace

11%

Upscale/luxury retailers (Ralph Lauren, Gucci, etc.)

9%

Note: ages 16-26; online or in-store

Source: ICSC. "The Rise of the Gen Z Consumer: Career-Driven, Credit-Averse and Tempted by Immersive Retail," June 7, 2023

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