

“Confessions of Shopaholic”: Satisficing Wants through Counterfeit Branded Fashion Goods Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. Consumption

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Abstract

Consumer demand has been a principal basis for the mushrooming counterfeit markets. Therefore, this dark market poses the most significant challenge for luxury brand manufacturers to stop consumers from engaging in counterfeiting activities. This paper, which was based upon a hermeneutic phenomenology study, endeavoured to uncover a rich and contextualised account of 12 consumers consumption experiences on the purchase of counterfeit branded fashion goods through in-depth interviews. The phenomenology approach was used to probe the living experience of consumers involved in counterfeit branded fashion goods consumption, and the consumers were selected via purposive and snowball sampling. The data were analysed employing thematic analysis. Four themes arose from this research; compensates original brand, unavailability, appears identical, and inadequacy, confirming how consumers satisfied their material needs by optimising the counterfeit branded fashion goods justified as a rational choice. This study added knowledge to counterfeit branded fashion goods and consumer behaviour as the emerging themes described the actual experiences captured from the consumers who were continuously involved in counterfeit consumption practice. This research contributed to scholarly and managerial awareness in the Malaysian context through more profound cognisance of the underlying motives of counterfeit consumption phenomena.

Keywords: Counterfeits, Branded Fashion Goods, Satisficing Needs, Phenomenology, Rationalisation Strategy.

Introduction

Consumers tend to rely on the “magical power” of the brand to represent self-image and identity, as well as to gain social approval from the society, thus leading to symbolic consumption (Grotts & Johnson, 2013; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Schembri et al., 2010). The

phenomenon of showcasing material possession within society leads to conspicuousness and materialist behaviour (Eastman & Eastman, 2015; Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012). Although such consumption behaviour promotes a lucrative market in the luxury brand industries, it presents an opportunity to counterfeiters that leads to illicit market. Consequently, counterfeiters would start taking advantage of the aspirational effect generated by the luxury brand markets to satisfy the material desire of the incapable market segment (Bekir et al., 2013).

Counterfeit goods have turned into an unsolved global issue with discussion prolonging for over a decade, while luxury brand manufacturers continue seeking a solution to paralyse the progressing counterfeit market. The International Trademark Association reported that approximately US\$1.3 trillion counterfeited goods are traded globally every year, and this is estimated to reach US\$2.81 trillion worth in 2022 (The Edge Markets, 2018). Billions of dollars in losses have been borne by manufacturers of luxury goods (Bekir et al., 2013; Bian & Moutinho, 2011a; Bian et al., 2016; Eisend & Schuchert-güler, 2006) due to the substitution effect created by the counterfeit market that devalues the brand images of original goods. Manufacturers of original goods have extensively invested in research and development, technology, and brand equity management to reap lucrative return on investment. Nevertheless, this scenario has turned into a liability to the manufacturers as irresponsible counterfeiters have seized the opportunities by creating demands for counterfeit goods (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015; Large, 2014; Staake et al., 2009).

Despite the various strategies devised and executed by brand owners and manufacturers (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015; Hoecht & Trott, 2014), scholars have identified creating a message that stresses on the negative implications of purchasing counterfeit goods is more effective, apart from improving the quality of original goods to distinguish them from the counterfeit version (Chaudhary & Zimmerman, 2013; Ting et al., 2016). Unfortunately, this effort is unfruitful due to the emergence of sophisticated information communication technology that has established a virtual retail market (dark market). This market functions as a platform that connects counterfeiters to consumers, which offers less risk and better convenience (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015; Guarnieri & Przystwa, 2013; Radon, 2012).

The literature depicts the role of consumer demand, apart from supply, ethical, and lawful issues, as well as the key to the survival of the counterfeit market (Bloch et al., 1993; Chaudhry & Cesareo, 2017; Large, 2014; Meraviglia, 2015; Staake et al., 2009). Counterfeit goods are usually associated with images of knock-off brands (Grossman & Shapiro, 1998; Staake et al., 2009; Zaichkowsky, 2000). The original goods are replicated, duplicated, and imitated to carry a similar brand image for a fraction of the cost of the authentic goods.

In precise, the involvement of consumers in counterfeit consumption is classified into deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeit purchase (Grossman & Shapiro, 1998). Deceptive counterfeit purchase occurs when consumers lack knowledge and information to distinguish counterfeit from original goods (Gino et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2018). On the contrary, non-deceptive counterfeit purchase reflects consumers equipped with sufficient knowledge and the ability to detect cues that indicate the counterfeit nature of the goods (Bian & Veloutsou, 2007; Sharma & Chan, 2011; Zampetakis, 2014).

The issue of counterfeit purchase has become a severe matter, as consumers feel that the purchase and consumption of such goods do not create any harmful effect on the society, the economy, and the authentic fashion goods industry (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015; Kim & Johnson, 2014b; Teo & Yusof, 2017). The Executive Director of the Asian Trade Centre, Deborah Elms, asserted that education and consumer awareness are the effective weapons to combat counterfeiting activities as consumers need to be aware that they are responsible for the development and survival of counterfeit market (The Edge Financial Daily, 2018). Similarly, Teo and Yusof (2017) highlighted on the importance of education and awareness programme from the emotional closeness dimension to expose the real fact to Malaysian consumers on how serious their purchase and consumption activities can affect our society and economic growth.

At present, Malaysia is one the Southeast Asian countries, alongside Vietnam and Thailand, to become a popular destination for counterfeiting activities (Sloan, 2012). Instead of struggling to combat the supplies, escalating consumer demands have led the Malaysian counterfeit market to hit a whopping RM464 million business value (Hashim et al., 2018). From July to November 2020, the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (KPDNHEP) had conducted raid operations that seized various categories of branded fashion goods, including clothes, bags, wristwatches, and shoes worth approximately RM1.6 million in Batu Caves, Selangor, RM38,795 in Johor, and RM67,750 in Balakong, Selangor (Malay Mail, 2020; The Star, 2020; The Sun Daily, 2020). All the raid operations were conducted with the cooperation of registered trademark owner representatives.

Literature Review

Prior studies focused on the emergence of counterfeit goods in light of consumer behaviour, as original brands lead to substitution, dilution, asymmetrical, and aspirational effects (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Bekir et al., 2013; Yoo & Lee, 2012). Both social class and income level are antecedents of the abovementioned effects because counterfeit goods serve as a tool for those with limited financial capability to own their “wish list” brands (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Jae Kim & Johnson, 2014b; Pueschel et al., 2016; Strehlau, 2013). The consumption theory upholds that consumers satisfy their well-being based on their income by purchasing goods that they believe can meet their material needs (Ferreira & Scaraboto, 2016). Despite the imperfect substitution, price-sensitive consumers are willing to compromise and accept the compromised quality and performance of counterfeit goods, as well as its psychosocial risks (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Lee & Yoo, 2009; Priporas et al., 2015; Wiedmann & Hennigs, 2017; Zaichkowsky, 2000).

Often, consumers rationalise what they have purchased is worthy as long as the counterfeit version fulfils their hedonic and utility needs (Key et al., 2013; Kim & Johnson, 2014a; Pueschel et al., 2016; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). In light of counterfeit goods purchase, emotional experiences, such as pleasure and enjoyment, are the outcomes that motivate consumers to get involved in counterfeit consumption activity (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017; Moon et al., 2018; Zampetakis, 2014). Hence, higher consumer involvement in rationale purchase leads to higher cognitive dissonance if the performance or satisfaction does not meet consumers’ expectation, thus leading to the element surprise. Similarly, in the context of counterfeit consumption, consumers were found to be aware of the inferior performance of counterfeit goods (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Zaichkowsky, 2000), thus did

not expect excellent functional benefits from counterfeit goods. Here, the act of satisfying the available options by rationalising counterfeits as “good enough” enables consumers to see their decision is indeed rationale. As a result, this rationalisation strategy aids consumers to eliminate mental discomfort, hence enabling them to compromise with the performance of the counterfeit goods. Literature found that consumers sought a satisfactory solution within the time available that functioned as ‘satisficer’ (Kalantari, 2010) and compensated that it was good enough for them to have the brand. Thus, the choices of counterfeit versions were not on the premise of needs maximisation, but as a rational choice that existed at the right time, which enabled consumers to wear their desired branded fashion goods.

Since fashion emphasises on certain styles ‘in’ for a limited period and goes out of fashion by the next season (Juggessur & Cohen, 2009), consumers find counterfeit brand offers an affordable alternative to keep up with fashion and trend (Gentry et al., 2006; Large, 2014). Priporas et al., (2015) depicted that regardless of economic condition, consumers seek alternative to pursue their interest in keeping up with fashion and trends via counterfeit consumption that offers low-cost image maintenance. The counterfeit market enables consumers to make wise decisions (Perez et al., 2010) and to keep pace with the fast fashion trend within their financial means (Ahuvia et al., 2013; Amaral & Loken, 2016; Jae Kim & Johnson, 2014b; Phau et al., 2001; Pueschel et al., 2016; Thaichon & Quach, 2016), instead of spending ‘extravagantly’ on easily faded item.

Furthermore, studies on counterfeit goods purchase in Malaysia have revealed value consciousness is one of the key factors that promote consumers’ attitudes and purchase intention in counterfeit consumption (Ting et al., 2016). This notion is in line with another study that found perceived values borne by counterfeit goods were more important during economic hardship (Mohd Nordin et al., 2013). Malaysian consumers have been exposed to the attitude of looking for bargains in spending every single cent of their money. In order to satisfy their material needs, consumers tend to imitate the lifestyle of others by purchasing counterfeit goods (Nordin et al., 2013). Consumers are aspired to imitate the consumption behaviour of the reference group to which they would like to belong, thus the motivation to “mimic” the lifestyle of the aspired social group by using counterfeit luxury brands (Phau et al., 2009b; Phau & Teah, 2009; Teah et al., 2015; Viet et al., 2018). Hence, consumers are motivated to learn extensively the various categories of counterfeit branded luxury goods to minimise psychosocial risks while carrying the counterfeit version (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016).

This study has been inspired by similar work in consumers’ motivation to purchase counterfeit luxury brands from the dimension of cognitive and affective elements, foregrounding the underlying sense of consumers’ involvement in counterfeit consumption. Literature review reported that consumers associated counterfeit goods with inferior images, exposing them to psychosocial risks and threatening their social status (Moon et al., 2018; Zaichkowsky, 2000). On the contrary, another literature indicated, when consumers are equipped with extensive knowledge regarding counterfeit markets and goods, they become competent to showcase their desired self-image and identity (Amaral & Loken, 2016c; Xuemei Bian et al., 2016; Peng et al., 2013; Pueschel et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010). Therefore, consumers ignore the social consequences (Phau et al., 2009) as the counterfeit market is “too good to resist” (Thaichon & Quach, 2016). It works as a “gateway” product that enables consumers to

minimise financial risks before buying the original luxury brand (Ahuvia et al., 2013; Key et al., 2013). Ergo, there is a need to study how consumers compensated counterfeits as “good enough” for them to satisfy their material needs from consumers’ live experiences. Therefore, it is too to investigate the underlying meanings beyond the motives of consumers’ involvement in counterfeit consumption.

Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of the study, phenomenology is applied to understand the meaning behind consumer involvement in counterfeit consumption behaviour. Phenomenology provides more insights from the actual consumers’ real-life experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and thus able to explain the increasing demand for counterfeit goods from the consumers’ continuous involvement. A semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted to allow the informants to talk freely, which “directed towards understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences as expressed in their words” and statements that infuse meaning (Seale & Silverman, 1997).

The researchers adopted a purposive and snowballing sampling strategy, and in total, including seven in-depth interviews with four male and three female participants. The researchers classified them as young adult consumers ranging from 20 to 33 years old. The informants should at least have a two years’ experience purchasing and using counterfeit fashion goods, i.e., actively purchasing, owning, and using counterfeit goods for the past six months. This criterion is imperative in defining consumer involvement (Freedman, 1964) as it describes consumers’ concern about, interest in or commitment to a particular position on counterfeit consumption. The informants chosen in this research were consumers who purchased counterfeit branded fashion goods, such as handbags, sunglasses, apparel, watches, purses, scarves, telekung (female Muslims prayer attire), shoes, slippers, and sandals. The researchers identified that these fashion goods categories had been the most frequently counterfeited in the literature. As for female scarves (hijab) and telekung, the researchers recognised brands such as Naelofar, Bawal Exclusive, Duck scarves, and Siti Khadijah as among the famous Muslim brands which have been counterfeited and sold widely in Malaysia (Berita Harian, 2016; Harian Metro, 2018; Malaysia Gazette, 2019; New Straits Times, 2018). The researchers audiotaped each in-depth interview and lasted from 30 to 90 minutes.

The researchers collected data in six months between May 2018 and October 2018 and conducted the interviews at the informants’ chosen locations. During the interview session, the researchers familiarised themselves with some terms, which the constructed meaning derived from the cultural values, such as “grade,” “premium,” “high-grade,” and “copy-ori”, which denoted counterfeit branded fashion goods. The researchers was attentive to the context to identify if the responses provided by the informants referred to the experience of purchasing and using genuine or counterfeit fashion goods. The researchers, too, encouraged the informants to share their experiences and knowledge in purchasing and using counterfeit branded fashion goods and their emotions during the interview sessions. As this study explored the meaning of consumption experiences, the informants could express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with both genuine and counterfeit fashion goods. It helped the researchers gain more insights into understanding the underlying motives of continuous consumer involvement in this counterfeit consumption.

In this research, the researchers performed thematic analysis as it offers a way of recognising and tapping the underlying themes in a given dataset, flexible enough to be modified for the needs of many studies, and non-intricate, besides providing rich and detailed data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Due to the bilingual nature of Malaysian speakers, no software automatically transcribed the mixture of recorded English and Malay conversations practised by the informants. Thus, the researchers transcribed it manually due to the constraints. Since the study aimed to discover the meaning from the actual consumer experience, the researchers analysed the statements to capture the sense. Therefore, the researchers transcribed all the recorded interviews. The researchers recorded all interview sessions and wrote them to generate interpretations via a hermeneutic circle during the data collection process. The step intended to comprehend and interpret the phenomenon based on the consumers' shared knowledge and experience.

The researchers kept transcriptions and other collected documents in a safe place to retain privacy and confidentiality. Initially, the researchers organised the data files prepared for the audiotaped interviews and completed informants' detailed sheets before the interview session and field notes, and named the files with a pseudonym for counterfeit branded fashion goods consumers to establish an effective organisation quickly. Then, the researchers listened to and transcribed verbatim each of the recorded interviews. Prior to the transcription process, the researchers reviewed the field notes of each informant to expand the initial impression of the interaction to know the central ideas, concepts, and issues raised by the informants. By using this approach, the researchers engaged in the process of self-reflection, whereby biases and assumptions of the researchers were not bracketed out (Laverty, 2003).

Next, the researchers reviewed and transcribed the audiotape word-by-word in Malay as the interview sessions were conducted using the Malay language. The audiotape was transcribed right after each interview ended, thus enabled the researchers to work a preliminary analysis to produce each transcription's main themes and subthemes. Preliminary analysis refers to the transcription's initial analysis to establish the initial code, subthemes, and main themes. Then, the researchers revised this initial analysis before finalising the subthemes and themes, facilitating the construction of emerging themes from the data. The entire transcription process necessitated the researchers to be attentive in listening, analysis, and interpretation. The transcriptions were read, reviewed, and compared with the audiotaped recording numerous times to identify and correct the contradictions, besides capturing an in-depth understanding of the captured responses. The researchers extracted the 'significant statement' from the transcription, potentially relevant and essential to answering the research questions. It involved identifying keywords, sentences, terms, and phrases pertinent to the phenomenon of interest from the informants' significant statements. Statements in the Malay language that the researchers quoted for data analysis and findings purposes were translated into English by the researchers.

The researchers briefed all the informants about the purpose of the interview and their position in this investigation. As for 'consent and ethics approval', the researchers obtained a written consent form to proceed with the study from each participant voluntarily. The researchers informed them that their rights and interests were essential when reporting and distributing the data. The researchers kept the name and other personal details of the

participants confidential. In an attempt to protect the identity of the participants, the researchers applied pseudonyms. The researchers securely stored all related records and data, and nobody other than the researchers could access them. They archived documents in a secure room, keeping them for three or seven years after completion.

To allow for a holistic perspective, the three researchers discussed all emerging themes. The interchange and discussion of interpretations helped the researchers define and redefine the direction of analysis. The researchers examined the categorisation of data and comparisons between the informant's reports to identify the main themes and subthemes. Demographic data are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Demographic Profile of Informants

The Informants	Years of consumption experiences	The most frequent purchase of counterfeit fashion goods/brand
Jenna, 33 years Female Entrepreneur	10 years	YSL, LV, Prada, Chanel Handbag, purse, belt, sunglass
Johan, 33 years Male Government agency officer	15 years	Adidas, Fila, Levis wallet, watch, slippers, apparels
Nadia, 28 years Female Executive	8 years	Coach, Givenchy handbag, Siti Khadijah Telekung, Naelofar hijab
Eddie, 20 years Male Sales promoter	3 years	Adidas, Supreme, Vans shoes, bag, apparel
Arman, 22 years Male University's student	5 years	Adidas, Nike shoes and jersey
Akim, 22 years Female University's student	2 years	Guess, Michael Kors handbag, purse Naelofar hijab
Jasmin, 22 years Female Admin Assistant	4 years	Hermes sandals, Skechers shoes, Salvatore Ferragamo and Gucci handbag
Izza, 33 years Female Government Officer	2 years	Longchamp tote bag, Naelofar and dUck scarves
Izzat, 22 years Male University's student	5 years	Nike and Adidas shoes, Polo wallet
Atie, 22 years Female University's student	2 years	Michael Kors handbag, Guess wallet, Naelofar scarves
Fiqa, 22 years Female University's student	2 years	Guess handbag and watch, Naelofar scarves
Zack, 20 years Male University's student	5 years	Vans shoes, G-shock watch, Adidas tracksuit

Findings and Discussion

Four main themes emerged related to the consumer's involvement in counterfeit fashion goods; compensating original brand, unavailability, seems identical, and inadequacy reflected satisfaction of consumers material needs through counterfeit branded fashion goods consumption.

Theme 1: Compensating original brand

Most of the informants claimed that counterfeit consumption offered a platform to satisfy their material needs, despite the compromised quality when compared to original fashion goods. The informants compensated their inability to purchase original branded fashion goods with the “second best” option that delivered similar tangible characteristics. As long as they could use the counterfeit version that carried a similar brand name and logo, the informants were satisfied in satiating their material desire. Instead of being frustrated with their inability to purchase original branded fashion goods, the informants succumbed to an alternative to wear their desired branded fashion goods as self-gifting to themselves.

“...I felt satisfied and thought that “I could wear it like the others too”. Although it was not the original one, at least I could wear them too...” (Izza, age 33)

“...I could not afford it, but I need it ... I bought copy-ori because of the brand. The difference with the other wallet was due to the brand...” (Izzat, age 22)

“...if I wish to have a designer brand, I will buy the first copy one.... But because I want to have it, it was fine with me ... and I could get the other authentic handbag from Charles & Keith at the same price.” (Jasmin, age 22)

Theme 2: Unavailability

An interesting factor that drove the informants’ involvement in counterfeit consumption refers to unavailability of the original branded fashion goods. Most of the informants asserted that the limited access to purchase original brands led to disappointment and frustration. Hence, the counterfeit branded fashion goods market exists to help consumers satisfy their material needs and desire.

The theme ‘unavailability’ revealed product scarcity and accessibility issue relating to the original branded fashion goods, thus urging consumers to seek alternatives to wear their desired brand. Therefore, although the informants possessed the purchasing power to pay for the original brand, they could not do so. As a result, the informants succumbed to counterfeit consumption to dissuade their disappointment in owning their desired branded fashion goods, as well as to prevent the feeling of being left out by trends, fashion, and social group members.

As shared by the consumers in this study, instead of wasting their time and effort searching for those limited stock, they found that counterfeit branded fashion goods were good enough as they could wear their desired latest collection and design. The literature describes satisficers prefer good enough option, easily satisfied with what is available, and reasonable for them at the right time as they do not want to spend much effort merely to achieve the value from the product (Luan & Li, 2017; Roubal, 2018).

“...I bought it because each time I wished to buy the new collection; it will be sold out on the website. It was so annoying...” (Nadia, age 28)

“Sometimes, it was quite challenging to buy the original goods because the stock was running out too quickly...” (Eddie, age 20)

“...for plus-size people like me, I do not have a chance to wear it... My size will not be available” (Johan, age 33)

Theme 3: Seems Identical

The theme of seems identical described how the informants felt that the counterfeit branded fashion goods delivered identical and mirror images of the original versions, which motivated them to be involved in counterfeit consumption. Although the value of satisfaction derived from counterfeit goods was less exquisite than the original ones, the chance to own the desired brand was sufficient to drive them to purchase the counterfeit merchandise.

The informants acknowledged that the exterior characteristics were more important to them as they were comparable to the original version. Thaichon and Quach (2016) also reported that the consumers were fully aware of the functional flaws of the counterfeit version, but resolved them with the excellent quality of product appearance (Pope et al., 2020). Thus, the consumers were indeed concerned about the replication quality of the exterior characteristics, which enabled them to reduce their financial and psychosocial risks. As depicted in the literature, the factors that influence consumers attitudes and purchase intention on counterfeit goods are psychosocial risks that expose them to social embarrassment if they are caught by others purchasing or wearing the counterfeit goods (Amaral & Loken, 2016b; Chen et al., 2014; Pueschel et al., 2016). However, extensive consumer involvement in searching for information on counterfeit goods leads to knowledge and skill enhancement, thus enabling them to select the best quality of counterfeit goods (Bian et al., 2016; Key et al., 2013; Hashim et al., 2018; Sharma & Chan, 2016; Thaichon & Quach, 2016), and reducing those psychosocial risks. When the informants pointed out “it looks similar”, it showed that they were satisfied with the high similarity of counterfeit version attributes to the original branded fashion goods. This is the point where consumers discovered that they received expected value, which is the high similarity of exterior characteristics of counterfeit goods from the money they had spent; signifying that the informants were satisfied with their ability to wear the desired branded fashion goods.

The informants confessed that their involvement in counterfeit consumption was motivated by the desire to wear branded fashion goods and to “show off that their goods were original.” They were proud of their decision to purchase counterfeit version as they could prevent the post-purchase dissonance feeling after purchasing costly original branded fashion goods. Upon getting involved in counterfeit consumption, the informants acknowledged that their purchase decision was indeed “worthwhile” and described themselves as wise for using the counterfeit market. Quintanilla et al (2010); Bian et al (2016) also reported that the consumers claimed that they were smart in making use of the counterfeit market with optimal resources.

“...We purchased the first copy goods to (attempt) show that the products are original.” (Jasmin, age 22)

“...It is tricky to compare the original version with the copied version because they look similar...” (Jenna, age 33)

“...They will assume that we are using the first copy one, anyway.” (Eddie, age 20)

Theme 4: Inadequacy

The findings showed that most of the informants experienced deprivation and scarcity in owning the latest design and collection of branded fashion goods. Negative emotions, such

as “the feeling of lack” and “having regrets”, described how internal tense urged the informants to keep buying and wearing new collections of counterfeit branded fashion goods.

As fashion goods have been characterised as quickly faded and having a short lifecycle (Juggessur & Cohen, 2009), consumers in this study described a feeling of deprivation when they saw any new design or collection in the social media network or at physical stores. They felt “a feeling of lacking” and “regret” if they could not purchase or use the desired brand; signifying the internal tension that urged them to keep consuming counterfeit branded fashion goods. The theme ‘inadequacy’ describes consumers’ insufficient feeling, which can turn into “a must” for them to purchase and use the new design or collection to prevent them from feeling regretful for missing such a good chance. This unpleasant feeling is felt by those with economic crisis striving to satiate their desire to purchase “new styles” immediately, thus resorting to counterfeit goods to overcome their negative emotions such as anger, sadness, anxiety, and regret (Ertekin et al., 2020).

“... If I do not buy it, I feel as if I do not have enough clothes. I feel something is lacking. I will think, *“Gosh, I always have the same cap, bag, and shoes”...*” (Eddie, age 20)

“... Because the design keeps on updating ... during the World Cup, I bought many new jersey designs. I managed to collect the nice ones ...” (Arman, age 22)

Despite the haunting inadequate feeling, the consumers neither spent excessively nor indulged in splurge consumption. They succumbed to counterfeit consumption in order to maintain their interest in using branded fashion goods with minimal investment. The study informants admitted that purchasing branded fashion goods was not to symbolise their social status, but to update themselves in line with the latest fashion, trend, and brand. Hence, consumers were trapped in internal conflict between the desire to keep up with the rapidly changing fashion trends and coping with their purchasing power (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020). By involving themselves in counterfeit consumption, consumers could satiate their inadequate feeling towards branded fashion goods and escape from post-purchase dissonance by overspending on these short lifecycle fashion goods.

In this study, the consumers revealed that they regretted when they missed the opportunity to purchase and wear their desired branded fashion. Purchasing the original items will only lead to regret due to overspending. Such regret reflects action and inaction (Rosenzweig & Gilovich, 2012), whereby consumers tend to regret of inaction for letting go the chance of “doing” the activity with others instead of “having” the material objects. On the contrary, Chen et al (2015) revealed that the consumers anticipated a feeling of regret when they purchased counterfeit goods due to social embarrassment if others knew about their counterfeit fashion goods. This contradiction is ascribed to society norms that internalise frugality and “bargain seekers” values, thus encouraging the consumers to spend their money minimally while enjoying the fashion goods by opting for counterfeit version and describing themselves as wise consumers. Instead of worrying about psychosocial risks, society acceptance seemed to approve this consumption practice and enabled consumers to internalise these values, which explains how consumers’ involvement in counterfeit consumption is widely accepted.

“... I also purchased first copy shoes. I just wanted to have more (collection) but rarely wear them. It was of the same model and design. Only the material was different.” (Izzat, age 22)

General Discussion

The four emerging themes represented how consumers were motivated to satisfy their desires for material wants with the available resources. The choices of counterfeit versions were not made based on needs maximisation but as a rational choice that existed at the right time, which empowered them to wear their aspired branded fashion goods. This conclusion relates to “bounded rationality” (Simon, 1955; 1997), in which consumers sought a satisfactory solution within the time available that worked as ‘satisficer’ (Kalantari, 2010) and compensated that it was good enough for them to own the brand. Although the high price was the principal concern for these consumers to purchase and use the original branded fashion goods, the scarcity of original branded fashion goods also motivated the consumers to engage in counterfeit consumption continuously, as specified by the theme ‘unavailability’. The literature only represented consumers with low-income levels actively involved in counterfeit goods purchase while dismissing the involvement of consumers with adequate financial means to purchase original branded fashion goods. Nevertheless, some research published that purchasing power and income level do not relate to the determinant factors of counterfeit goods purchase intention (Ahuvia et al., 2013; Eisend et al., 2017).

In this research, the consumers shared their experiences of seeking the original brands that involved a long process. Some consumers could afford to pay for the original brands but could not do so due to failure to commit to the time and effort to pursue the best outcome that required comprehensive information search and evaluation. Therefore, to satisfy their material wants, they opted for the most straightforward alternative - a counterfeit version that carries the identical physical characteristics of the desired brand and justifies it as “the second-best” following the original brand. Consumers facing financial constraints viewed the counterfeit versions as a solution to satisfy their wants, besides rationalising their choice as “good enough” to please their material wants with the optimal resources at hand. Hamilton et al. (2019) maintained that resource scarcity had to alter the definition of the luxury product and lose the exclusivity as it attracts non-affluent consumers whose income level is not meant for status goods. Hence, counterfeiters emerge to cater to this segment of consumers’ material needs and desires.

Both product and resource scarcities empower consumers to justify their involvement in counterfeit consumption. They considered that practising satisficing decision-making style and justifying the goods as “good enough” were methods to cope with the unpleasantness and discomfort of purchasing and wearing counterfeit goods. As the consumers were aware of the price-quality relationship of counterfeit goods (Amaral & Loken, 2016b; Zaichkowsky, 2000), they compensated their feeling that the quality was good enough for them to wear the fashionable items, as well as the ability to own more branded fashion goods collection; instead of being concerned with the quality and performance. Consequently, consumers also felt less guilty buying the counterfeit items by explaining that their sizes were unavailable and the collection was limited, thus dissuading any discomfort and altering the existing cognition of the counterfeit goods quality and inferior image. As stipulated in the CDT, this rationalisation and justification of behaviour strategy let consumers reduce any displeasing

and contradictory feelings when purchasing and wearing the counterfeit brand (Festinger, 1957). This rationalisation strategy discusses cognitive dissonance related to counterfeit consumption or the discrepancies between their actual behaviour and the current negative cognition on counterfeit branded fashion goods. This study disclosed that the consumers were not disappointed due to their incapability to purchase and wear the desired original branded fashion goods as they could satisfice their wants by purchasing counterfeit versions and justifying them as “good enough.” Therefore, easy access to counterfeits accompanied by consumers’ inclination towards counterfeits did compensate for their discomfort towards contradicting beliefs, low and inferior quality, and their actual behaviour towards counterfeit goods. Therefore, the consumers considered that scarcity of resources and the product allowed them to use the desired branded fashion goods by satisficing their choice to purchase counterfeit goods as ‘good enough’ without any feeling of dissonance or regretting their choices of fashion goods.

Moreover, they established the need to submit to fashion and stay “in vogue” before others with minimal investment (Gentry et al., 2006), encouraging counterfeit consumers to follow their desired lifestyle. The counterfeit market let the price-sensitive informants stay connected to a brand at an affordable price that delivered good value for money. Unlike purchasing the original branded fashion goods, consumers engaged in counterfeit consumption determined that the price-quality relationship of counterfeit products as offering great value for their money, instead of high functional quality and performance of the goods. The emerging themes illustrated how material objects initiated the feelings of scarcity and deprivation among the consumers. These consumers expressed their intense emotional feelings towards branded fashion goods that led to repetitive purchasing episodes to create their desired “wardrobe” with counterfeit versions. Priporas et al (2015) suggested that counterfeit consumption is a solution for consumers to keep up with the latest fashion and brand during the economic downturn. The financial limitation faced by the consumers correlates to poverty anxiety, defined as an “experience of sadness and anxiety for incapacity to purchase desired products” (Pope et al., 2020). Those who pursue extrinsic life goals strive to own and acquire branded goods. Thus their preference for counterfeit goods signifies a high brand value (Trinh, Viet-Dung Phau, 2012). As consumers believe possession of material objects contributes to life pleasure and fulfilment, non-wealthy consumers choose counterfeit goods to overcome their sadness, anger, distress, frustration, regret, and anxiety on their disability to own original luxury brand (Ertekin et al., 2020; Trinh & Phau, 2012).

Conclusion

This article endeavoured to understand how social values and norms legitimise consumers’ involvement in counterfeit consumption activity. Conclusions reported four central themes that suggested different meanings of how consumers compensated counterfeit branded fashion goods as a rationale choice which enabled them to satisfice current material needs and wants within optimal resources. This study proposed to inspire a novel perspective in counterfeit studies, particularly among young adult consumers in Malaysia. By studying at the level of Malaysian consumer awareness on this issue, there is the possibility that counterfeit consumption will maintain and evolve to be a severe problem for the legitimate fashion goods industry.

Consequently, it establishes a worrying trend, uniquely among the local fashion entrepreneurs, if society approves the counterfeit consumption behaviour. Although the researchers expected the challenge of convincing counterfeit consumers to share their consumption experiences and thoughts, they proposed an alternative ethnographic or netnographic method among the teenagers in a future study to follow the counterfeit community that existed in our society. Both of the methods provided robust data through comprehensive observation. Thus, participating in community interaction could develop an in-depth understanding of the community culture, particularly counterfeit consumption communities. As intellectual property rights are vital to Malaysia's economy, targeting youngsters and teenagers as respondents is indispensable to formulate and intensify awareness to protect Malaysia's future economy. Ergo, the act of satisficing needs with the existing resources, counterfeit branded fashion goods enabled consumers to legitimise their consumption practice.

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