

Lived Meanings of Counterfeit Branded Fashion Goods for Everyday Consumption

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Abstract

Due to the plethora of counterfeit goods in the physical and virtual marketplace, the plummeting demand for genuine fashion goods led to social and economic problems in the fashion goods industry. These dark markets pose the most critical challenge for luxury brand manufacturers in discouraging consumers from participating in counterfeiting activities. Based on a hermeneutic phenomenology study, this research attempted to examine an exhaustive and contextualised account of 12 consumers consumption experiences on the purchase of counterfeit branded fashion goods through in-depth interviews. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, and two themes emerged from this study; special occasions and prized collection. It validated that consumers refused to detach from the brand and purchased counterfeit branded fashion goods due to the intense attachment with the desired brand. It enables them to connect to the brand daily, which echoed profane consumption. The data confirmed how consumers treat the original branded fashion goods as sacred objects, even though the value should be preserved, and their involvement in counterfeit consumption was merely to protect those original branded fashion goods. This analysis adds knowledge to counterfeit branded fashion goods and consumer behaviour as the emerging themes depicted the actual experiences captured from the consumers who continuously involved in counterfeit consumption practice.

Keywords: Counterfeit Goods, Fashion Goods, Phenomenology, Everyday Consumption, Brand Love

Introduction

The issue of counterfeit goods has been discussed prolonging for over a decade, seems to be unsolved global issues due to the emergence of E-commerce and digital market. OECD reported around 54% of global counterfeit products imported through small parcels between 2017-2019 were sold to consumers who aware with the status of product, while 46% of the consumers unaware they are purchasing the counterfeit version (OECD, 2023). Consequently, the creation of asymmetrical effects on the social hierarchy, leading to unequal judgments and perceptions of the social classes, has been manipulated by “smart” consumers in camouflaging their self-identity to ‘secretly’ participate in counterfeit consumption (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016). Consumers whose equipped with extensive knowledge regarding counterfeit market and goods, able to utilise and demonstrate their expertise in selecting the best quality of counterfeit luxury fashion goods to showcase their desired self-image and identity without being caught by the others, enhancing their self-confidence in deceiving others, thus rationalising it is worth to sustain their involvement in counterfeit consumption practice (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Bian et al., 2016; Peng et al., 2013; Perez et al., 2010; Pueschel et al., 2016; Thaichon & Quach, 2016).

Studies found that the existence of counterfeit goods serves as a “gateway” product that enables consumers to minimise financial risks before deciding to purchase original luxury brand (Ahuvia et al., 2013; Key et al., 2013). The literature depicts that counterfeit goods are meant for low- and middle-income groups or social class consumers (Augusto de Matos et al., 2007; Zaichkowsky, 2000). However, the perceived value dimension (Wiedmann & Hennigs, 2017) also attracts high-income and high-social class consumers to indulge in this unethical consumption (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016). Eisend et al., (2017) asserted that demographic characteristics do not affect consumer’s attitudes, intention, or behaviour on counterfeit brand products, thus reflecting that counterfeit market is not meant for those unaffordable only.

The literature on counterfeit goods purchase depicts identical tangible characteristics of luxury brand (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Large, 2014; Staake et al., 2009) enabled consumers to preserve attractive appearance, image, and popularity with minimal investment (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). Hence, 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). In the pursue of satiating material needs, 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).

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 (Mohd Nordin et al., 2013). The literature depicts that Millennial consumers are heavy users of luxury fashion products that are frequently counterfeited The Boston Consulting Group-Altgamma (2017) and aimed by counterfeiters due to their low income (Chakraborty

et al., 1996; Cordell et al., 1996; H. Kim & Karpova, 2010; Marcketti & Shelley, 2009; Wilcox et al., 2009; Yoo & Lee, 2012). As consumers become reliant on the visible cues reflected by luxury brand, counterfeit versions are the best option for these young adult consumers who face financial constraints to emulate their desired social status (Phau & Teah, 2009; Hashim et al., 2018) and to keep up with fashion.

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).

To date, raid operation of counterfeit products by Malaysian authority body reported that the seizure worth RM69 million between the year 2020 until February 2023 (The Star, 2023). Previously, Malaysia is recognised as a shopping heaven for “bargain hunters” who seek affordable branded luxury goods that can be easily accessed from unregulated outlets, registered stores, and online platforms (Malaysian Gazette, 2019). One question that needs to be addressed in response to this worrisome issue is whether Malaysian consumers realise that their current consumption practices and behaviour lead to substantial destruction to the planet and humans. This is a matter of concern for the policymakers and government to address, as the tremendous investment of textile and fashion industry, seems to affect the sustainability of the environment. Nevertheless, the fast pace of fashion development leads to adverse impacts on the counterfeit activity. It incorporates not only intellectual property rights and product infringement issues, but also sweatshop labour, overconsumption of natural resources, waste management, environmental and pollution problems. Moreover, the mass production of fashion goods also created a waste consumption phenomenon as consumers overspend their money and engage in splurge buying behaviour due to the low price, encouraging them to afford to change their styles and keep up with a trend. Fashion goods such as clothing and apparel, previously considered durable goods that were not regularly purchased, have now become “everyday” purchases (Brydges, 2021). Hence, consumers are expected to keep discarding and changing their clothes or other fashion goods, looking for affordable alternative to fill-up their fashion collection through counterfeit version. Therefore, it is integral to inform consumers that the values sought from counterfeit consumption exert adverse implications to the society and the country. This message is more effective to hinder the escalating demand from Malaysian consumers for counterfeit goods and to prevent any adverse effect on the national economy. Specifically, this study addresses the following objectives:

- i) To discover the meaning of counterfeit consumption from the perspectives of consumers’ lived experience
- ii) To explore how brand love motivate consumers to engage in counterfeit consumption

Literature Review

Fashion goods become a medium and tools for consumers to project their self-identity and esteem, personality as well as social position, thus, leading to a tremendous demand on fashion goods and brand. Fashion is defined as a result of ever-changing cultural shifts in preferences, tastes, and choices. In response to this promising market of luxury fashion brand, counterfeiters looking for an opportunity to cater the needs of “disadvantage” consumers

that having financial constraint with the idea of affordable, low-cost and similar physical characteristics of luxury fashion goods. Prior literature pointed that consumers demand are the key factors that creating the counterfeit good purchase phenomenon whereby a fashion-conscious consumer puts pressure on the industry to be innovative in producing latest and newest styles (Ramos et al., 2019).

Prior studies have also revealed that consumers are motivated to purchase counterfeit luxury brand as such goods can enhance their self-image, identity, and self-esteem (Peng et al., 2013; Perez et al., 2010; Phau et al., 2009b, 2013; Priporas et al., 2015; Stoner & Wang, 2014). The outstanding quality of duplication on the physical characteristics of the counterfeit version (Key et al., 2013) enables consumers to enjoy the brand transferability, hence accomplishing the desired image and appearance. Besides constructing social identity (Phau et al., 2009a, 2013; Teah et al., 2015), consumers found that by showcasing their counterfeit luxury brand, they can also build their self-image and identity (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Bian et al., 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). This symbolic benefits arise from the high quality of replication of counterfeit goods, which further influences consumers' attitude and intention to purchase counterfeit luxury brands (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015; Key et al., 2013; Pueschel et al., 2016).

Value consciousness has been identified as an influential factor that motivates consumers to purchase counterfeit goods as they are concerned about paying low prices, subject to some quality constraint (Eisend & Schuchert-güler, 2006; Phau et al., 2013; Phau & Teah, 2009; Staake et al., 2009; Teah et al., 2015; Wilcox et al., 2009). Hence, the price has a greater influence on consumer purchase (Batra, 2012; Cui & Liu, 2001), describing consumers as very price-sensitive, as the satisfaction coming from the low price that they paid for the desired branded fashion goods without sacrificing plenty of money. Similarly, Quintanilla et al (2010) discovered that counterfeit consumers defined themselves as efficient in optimising their resources and that utilising the counterfeit market as a good decision which is "more worthwhile" spending money on an identical copied of branded fashion goods. Thus, the "affordability" issue made consumers realise their money's worth which enable them to own more branded fashion goods collection. Prior studies noted that consumers involved in non-deceptive counterfeit were aware of the inferior quality of counterfeit goods and admitted that the quality was incomparable to the original brand (Amaral & Loken, 2016b; Large, 2014; Hashim et al., 2018; Zaichkowsky, 2000). Instead of being concerned about the inferior functional quality, counterfeit luxury brand provides these consumers the opportunity to satiate their craving for wearing branded fashion goods at a low price, in which they could not afford to obtain them previously (Phau & Teah, 2009; Priporas et al., 2015; Swami et al., 2009; Teah et al., 2015).

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 (Xuemei Bian et al., 2016; Key et al., 2013; Nik Hashim et al., 2018; Sharma & Chan,

2016b; Thaichon & Quach, 2016), and reducing those psychosocial risks. Indeed, 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 literature depicts, despite being highly value-conscious and price-sensitive, young consumers display very strong attachment and connection to a brand (Ismail et al., 2020). Additionally, these group of consumers seek quality products and prefer global brands to local ones (Tjiptono et al., 2020), have a strong desire to show off high-class and hedonic lifestyle, as well as prefer affordable prices (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019; Truong et al., 2010b). Hence, the need to conform to fashion and stay “in-vogue” before others with minimal amount of investment (Gentry et al., 2006) help counterfeit consumers to emulate their desired lifestyle. The counterfeit market enabled the price-sensitive informants to stay connected to a brand at an affordable price that gave good value for money. Unlike purchasing the original branded fashion goods, consumers involved in counterfeit consumption found that the price-quality relationship of counterfeit products is regarded as offering good value for their money, instead of high functional quality and performance of the goods. Prior literature claims that luxury brand consumers tend to buy counterfeit brands to safeguard their popularity and attractiveness since they face scarce financial resources (Fastoso et al., 2018; Priporas et al., 2015). Financial limitation is a form of resource scarcity defined as the real or perceived lack of various forms of capital (i.e., financial, social, cultural) or other production inputs (i.e., time) that the consumer invests in order to acquire and use goods/services (Hamilton et al., 2019).

The literature asserts that consumers’ attitudes and behaviour are strongly influenced by a brand as they are emotionally attached to a brand (Batra et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019). The existing cognition, belief, as well as evaluation of the high price and quality of original branded fashion goods, portray a high brand image that symbolises meaning to consumers (Cho & Fiore, 2015; Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019; Turunen & Leipämaa-leskinen, 2015). Belk et al., (1989) pointed out that material object that infuses a special meaning to an individual will be set apart from everyday usage, which is also known as profane consumption (Loroz, 2006), thus, signifies how consumers develop a deeper relationship with the object.

Studies that adopted the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) had assessed consumers’ motivation behind counterfeit consumption and later were directed to different paths and objectives. Bian et al., (2016) found that consumers devised cognitive moral logic to justify their involvement and outlined several hedonic benefits and consequences from their involvement. Pueschel et al (2016) ascertained how consumers arrived at several risk perceptions to cope with the uncertain psychosocial risks of counterfeit consumption. Sharma and Chan (2016b) revealed that consumers’ prior experience with counterfeit goods purchases led to a bias evaluation of favourable beliefs, which enabled them to minimise cognition inconsistency, thus influencing their purchase intention.

The consumers ascribed counterfeit consumption as an opportunity to keep up with the fashion and trend, apart from serving as a tool to protect the value of the original branded fashion goods. Given how the consumers conjured up the meaning of counterfeit consumption as a platform to satiate their cravings on using the desired branded fashion goods, the psychological connection they made with counterfeit consumption had little to do with inferior or low-quality image and quality performance. People may choose to change their attitudes, behaviour or beliefs to reduce dissonance, so as to enable them to “excuse” their contradictory behaviour to compensate their own feelings and resolve any discomfort

feeling (Jeong et al., 2019; McGrath, 2017). By exploring the meaning of counterfeit consumption through the phenomenology studies, consumers in this study revealed how meaningful to be associated with the preferred brand in their daily lives, which contributing to the escalating demand on counterfeit branded fashion goods.

Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of the study, phenomenology is applied to understand the meaning behind consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption behaviour. This study adopted a purposive and snowballing sampling strategy, and in total, including twelve in-depth interviews with six male and six female participants. The researchers classified them as young adult consumers ranging from 20 to 33 years old. The informants should at least have 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 Muslim prayer attire), shoes, slippers, and sandals as these fashion goods categories had been the most frequently counterfeited. 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, which lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Demographic data are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Demographic profile of informants

Informants	Occupation	Years of counterfeit consumption experiences
Jenna, 33 years, Female	Entrepreneur	10 years
Joe, 33 years, Male	Officer at government agency	15 years
Nadia, 28 years, Female	Information Technology executive	8 years
Izza, 33 years, Female	Government officer	2 years
Eddie, 20 years, Male	Sales promoter	3 years
Zack, 20 years, Male	University's student	5 years
Jasmin, 22 years, Female	Admin Assistant	4 years
Arman, 22 years, Male	University's student	5 years
Akim, 22 years, Male	University's student	7 years
Fiqa, 22 years, Female	University's student	2 years
Izzat, 22 years, Male	University's student	5 years
Atie, 22 years, Female	University's student	2 years

The researchers collected data for six months between May 2018 and October 2018 and conducted the interviews at the informants' chosen locations which lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The selected informants have been briefed 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 and to protect the identity of the participants, the researchers applied pseudonyms.

All the data has been analysed into 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). To allow for a holistic perspective, researcher triangulation has been conducted to validate the data analysis and findings. The interchange and discussion of interpretations helped the researchers to 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.

Findings and Discussion

Two main themes emerged related to the consumer's involvement in counterfeit fashion goods; special occasion and prized collection reflected how the consumers protected their original belonging from any potential spoilage as they felt that the original version was sacred and had symbolic values in their lives.

Theme 1: Special Occasion

This theme described how the informants indicated a strong sense of attachment to original branded fashion goods. Therefore, they were motivated to find alternative goods in protecting the value of the branded fashion goods, which was meaningful to them. The informants believed that the counterfeit version served as a protection tool of the original version; thus, sustaining their involvement in counterfeit consumption.

Zack is a male and 20 years of age, a university student that love to purchase and wear Vans shoes, adidas tracksuits and G-shock watch. He revealed his bitter experience when he used his original Vans shoes during a workshop at the university. He described a feeling of frustration as he always tripped on the machines with his original Vans' shoes, which eventually damaged the appearance of his shoes. As he frequently spent his time at the workshop and worked with a machine, he realised that wearing his original Vans' shoes would ruin the condition of his shoes, thus the feeling of regret for he was unable to protect his shoes. As a result, he wore the copied version of Vans's shoes to the university. He kept his original Vans' shoes at home and wore them occasionally for leisure activity. Hence, he bought three pairs of copied Vans' shoes throughout his three-year study period at the university merely to replace his original Vans' shoes when attending classes.

"I bought both the original and first copy shoes. For daily use, such as going to the class and workshop, I preferred wearing the first copy one. Due to safety reason in the workshop, I would wear the first copy version. There was an incident when I accidentally kicked a machine in the workshop. I felt that it was a waste to wear original shoes because I love them. So, I wore three first copy Vans shoes while studying for 3 years at the university. I had three first copy Vans and one original

Vans. I keep the original pair at home and wore it for leisure activities. I love my original shoes and I felt that it would be a waste to wear them daily.” (Zack)

Eddy is a male and 20 years of age, a sales promoter that love to purchase and collect brands such as Adidas, Supremes, Places Plus Faces, Vans shoes, bags and apparel. He pointed out a feeling of regretful when he wore original fashion goods for daily usage. The original fashion goods were too valuable for him to be worn for daily consumption. Hence, he kept his costly goods in the closet and boxes to preserve their value, instead of wearing them to workplace. For him, the decision to purchase and wear both original and counterfeit versions was determined by the types of usage, occasion, and with whom he hanged out together. As for the original version, he preferred wearing them during special occasions, such as wedding, holidays, and hanging out with friends. Meanwhile, the counterfeit version that dismisses much protection and care, was worn for daily usage, such as to work.

“As for me, I bought first copy products because if I wear the original ones for daily usage, such as going to work, it would be wasted. Am I right? I prefer keeping the original ones in the closet and box, besides wearing them while hanging out with friends, shopping, and holiday. I used the first copy goods depending on usage, such as bag, shoes, and shirts for daily usage and for work. If I’m going to a wedding and or any special event, I would wear the original one. If I wear my original shoes to work by bike on daily basis, they will be damaged if it rains. Therefore, it is better to wear the first copy version to work.” (Eddie)

Atie is a female and 22 years of age, a university student that frequently purchase Naelofar hijab, Guess and Michael Kors handbag and purse. She felt that it was better to wear the copied version of Naelofar hijab (Muslim women scarf) to class daily, although she agreed with others that it was better to purchase the original version as it is more long-lasting. She noted that wearing the original hijab was only worthwhile for special events, such as going out with someone special. She added that something expensive should be worn only for special occasion.

“I do not mind because we are not wearing the original one every day. I wear the original scarf if there is an event or when I go out. If I am going to the class, I would wear the first copy version. If I have to attend a special occasion, such as a special date, I will use the original one. It depends on the situation. If one wants to use the product for long term, it would be better to buy the original version. It is true. As for me, the copied version is sufficient for daily usage. If we wear the original one for a special event, we will be motivated to dress up more attractively. As for the copy goods, they are suitable for daily usage. It is not worthy to wear the original one for everyday usage.” (Atie)

Theme 2: Prized Collection

This theme the need to protect the value of his original branded fashion goods and decided to keep them as precious collection. Based on the Cambridge dictionary, prized is defined as something valuable and important.

Joe is a male, 33 years of age, a government officer that love to collect Adidas, Fila, Levis, Marvel apparels, wallet, watches and slippers. He believed that his original T-shirt is

precious and important to his life, thus decided not to wear it as he felt that it was important to protect such prized item. However, since he had still wanted to wear branded items to keep up with the trends; he purchased the copied version of the desired T-shirt to be worn. Joe felt that he was protecting the value of the original T-shirt. He believed that keeping the original version in good condition was a smart investment for future, and wearing the copied one enabled him to keep up with the latest trends

“Since I kept a lot of original t-shirts and framed them, my wife was curious about my intention and asked me about it. I also bought the same T-shirt in the first copy version. I told my wife that the one in the frame was original, and the one that I wear was the first copy version. I believe that the price of the original goods will increase in future. I have both the original ones for my personal collection and the first copy ones to wear.” (Joe)

Apparently, Joe was willing to spend some extra cash on both versions as he found that the counterfeit market gave him a platform to pursue his hobbies and interest. He believed that by keeping the original version in a “special place” was a smart action to preserve the value of his original T-shirt. Simultaneously, he purchased the counterfeit T-shirt to replace the original one as profane usage. He believed that both versions are important to his life in fulfilling his material needs and desire.

Indeed, both themes portrayed how brand love, which has been described as intense emotional bond on the particular brand Thomson et al (2005), built the consumer-brand relationship (Huber et al., 2015). Consumers’ involvement in counterfeit consumption was driven by a sense of “sentimental” feeling, whereby they became concerned about the usage of their branded fashion goods. The consumers refused to wear the original branded fashion goods on daily usage as they felt worried if they could not preserve the value of the original branded fashion goods.

The theme ‘special occasion’ describes the efforts taken by the consumers to protect their original branded fashion goods by purchasing the same brand, model, and design of the counterfeit version for daily consumption. Apparently, it was not worthwhile wearing the original branded fashion goods for mundane usage as they believed that such an act would decrease the value of the original fashion goods. This finding denotes the concept of brand mystery that describes consumers’ personal beliefs, thoughts, and evaluations of a particular brand in relation to the functional, price, and symbolic values Cho & Fiore (2015); whereby the consumers believed that high price and quality of the original branded fashion goods symbolised the worthiness and value of the brand that should only be used during special occasion. This mysterious element of the brand influence consumers’ passionate feeling towards brand (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019).

Hence, consumers' concern about taking precautionary steps to protect their original branded fashion goods through counterfeit consumption as they refused to detach from the aspired brand in their daily consumption. The consumers shared that purchasing original branded fashion goods was not easy as they required plenty of money; hence the move to buy copied versions. Counterfeit consumption enabled them to segregate their consumption based on daily usage and special occasions, wherein the counterfeit version suited hard-core usage. The copied version dismisses intricate care or protection, easy to find, and replaceable, thus need not worry to protect the original branded fashion goods. Interestingly, an informant in this study shared the decision to keep the original branded fashion goods in a

“special place” as they were precious and important to his life. Hence, the theme ‘prized collection’ denotes consumers treating the original branded fashion goods as the most valuable possession and considering them for future investment. In this light, the informant acknowledged the contribution of the counterfeit version that satisfied his need to keep up with the fashion without sacrificing the value of the original branded fashion goods. Although he had to invest more money to buy both versions of branded fashion goods, he was satisfied with the purchase decision as he could pursue his hobby and interest in collecting branded fashion goods. He believed that both versions of branded fashion goods were vital to his life, thus sustained his involvement in counterfeit consumption activity.

Surprisingly, counterfeit consumption which has been recognised as illegal and unethical consumption practice, enabled consumers to preserve the value of the original branded fashion goods by performing dual consumption; counterfeit for profane usage and original for sacred usage. The themes indicate that the consumers had intense feelings towards the branded fashion goods, as they pointed out the original ones deserve to be treated with reverence. The literature asserts that consumers’ attitudes and behaviour are strongly influenced by a brand as they are emotionally attached to a brand (Batra et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019). The existing cognition, belief, as well as evaluation of high price and quality of original branded fashion goods, portray a high brand image that symbolises meaning to consumers Cho & Fiore (2015); Rodrigues & Rodrigues (2019); Turunen & Leipämaa-leskinen (2015), wherein the value of the original brand is preserved since it is too sacred. As a result, consumers distinguished the use of the two versions of branded fashion goods based on occasion and situation, which required them to purchase and wear both original and counterfeit versions. These findings are in line with sacred consumption highlighted by Belk et al (1989), in which material object that infuses a special meaning to an individual will be set apart from everyday usage, which is also known as profane consumption (Loro, 2006).

The consumers in this study were committed to their favourite brand as they were not willing to be detached from the brand for daily consumption, signifying brand intimacy. Cho and Fiore (2015) noted that consumers treat their favourite brand similar to building long-term friendship, thus having a sense of intimacy with the brand. To keep their relationship with the brand, consumers repurchase their favourite brand in counterfeit version, which is more worthwhile for daily consumption without any worry to preserve the value of the original goods. The literature also highlights brand love, where consumers recognise social and psychological benefits from their long-lasting brand relationship (Huber et al., 2010).

By consuming both versions, the consumers were able to protect the “sacredness” of their original branded fashion goods by wearing and using them only during special occasion, besides keeping them as precious collection for the goods were too valuable to be worn for daily usage. These consumers did not mind spending some resources (time, effort, and money) to search the identical copied as a substitute of the original version for their daily usage. Ahuvia et al., (2013) classified counterfeit consumers who purchased both categories of original and counterfeit luxury brands as “omnivorous buyers” who had the urge to create their “desired wardrobe”. Although these “omnivorous” consumers can afford to purchase the original luxury brand, they are not satisfied purchasing only the original luxury brand as it enables them to save more cost in owning more collection and design. As for the informants in this study, those who practised sacred consumption can be classified as “omnivorous” consumers, as their aim is to protect and preserve their original branded fashion goods, thus the need to purchase both versions of the branded fashion goods. The consumers ascribed

counterfeit consumption as an opportunity to keep up with the fashion and trend, apart from serving as a tool to protect the value of the original branded fashion goods. Given how the consumers conjured up the meaning of counterfeit consumption as a platform to satiate their cravings on using the desired branded fashion goods, the psychological connection they made with counterfeit consumption had little to do with inferior or low-quality image and quality performance.

Table 2
Meaningful Pattern of Counterfeit Branded Fashion Goods Consumption and Themes

		Themes: Special Occasion
Informants		Meanings
Zack		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counterfeits as a tool to protect original branded fashion goods
Eddy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original version occasionally wears for leisure activity Prefer to keep the original branded fashion goods in the closet and boxes and only wear them for leisure activity Used and wear the counterfeit version for daily usage such as going to work Decide to purchase both versions of fashion goods to preserve the value of original brand
	Atie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original brand only worth for special event and someone special since it was expensive Counterfeit version suitable for daily usage such as going to the class Not worthy to wear the original brand for everyday usage
		Theme: Prized Collection
Informants		Meanings
	Joe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase the counterfeit version to protect the value of the original fashion goods The original version was precious and important to his life and it should be protected Keeping the original version in a good condition was a smart investment for future Willing to spend some money on both versions to pursue his hobbies and interest in keeping up with the latest trends

Conclusion

This study elucidates a significant meaning of counterfeit consumption with the emergent themes of special occasion and prized collection from consumers’ lived experiences which could be described as sacred consumption. Sacred consumption has been discussed widely in the context of ritual object associated with traditional religious aspects, such as

Christmas consumption (Tynan & McKechnie, 2006), Islamic consumption (Jafari et al., 2011), and responsible consumption (Cherrier, 2009; Kunchambo et al., 2017), which infuse a symbolic meaning. Turning to this present study, the consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption infused a special meaning that can be regarded as sacred consumption from their lived experiences. As both of the themes (special occasion and prized collection) are absent in the literature, this study significantly contributes to the counterfeit consumption body of knowledge. Both themes special occasion and prized collection denote how counterfeit fashion goods enable consumers to preserve the values of the original version which could be regarded as "sacred" that infuse a special meaning to the consumers. Both of the emerging themes shed light on the fact that involvement in counterfeit consumption motivated by the need to protect and preserve the original fashion brands, somehow should be addressed by the fashion manufacturer to prevent this illicit market.

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