

## **Boasting and Gloating: How Social Media Networks Motivate Consumers to "Show Off" their Counterfeit Branded Fashion Goods?**

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### **Abstract**

The prominence of social media networks inspires consumers to "fake" their material belongings and lifestyles by consuming counterfeit branded fashion goods. The gravity to 'keep up with the Joneses' through fashion and trends contributed to the plethora of counterfeit fashion brands in the physical and virtual marketplace, leading to social and economic quandaries in the branded fashion goods industry. Consumer demand has been an absolute reason for the skyrocketing counterfeit markets. Thus, 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 endeavoured to explore an exhaustive and contextualised account of consumer consumption experiences on the purchase of counterfeit branded fashion goods through in-depth interviews. The researchers employed the phenomenology approach to probe into the living experience of consumers involved in counterfeit branded fashion goods consumption. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, and four themes materialised from this study; inadequacy, showing off, branded value buy and dedicated. It substantiated, consumers obsessed with displaying their material possessions promoted a "logofication" culture and lifestyle. Consequently, consumers utilise social media networks to show off their fake material objects, allowing them to emulate their material possession without being caught by others. Social media networks facilitate consumers to feel more secure, thus authorising them to build their desired self-image without spending much on showcasing the original brands. Ultimately, it fosters a conspicuous lifestyle. This analysis adds facts to counterfeit branded fashion goods, and consumer behaviour as the emerging themes represent the actual experiences captured from the consumers who are continuously involved in counterfeit consumption practice without feeling anxious and exposed to psychosocial risks. Further, this research contributes to scholastic and organisational

proficiency in the Malaysian context by comprehending the exact grounds of counterfeit consumption.

**Keywords:** Counterfeit Branded Fashion Goods, Conspicuous, Social Media, Phenomenology.

## Introduction

Consumption-related behaviours play a subtle but essential part in developing, constructing, and forming self-identity. Lavish and extravagant material ownership always being perceived to have the “magical power” to bestow one’s social position (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Geiger-Oneto et al., 2013). As a result, throughout the process of constructing identity, this material thing becomes a “mark and mask” (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010). In a nutshell, the choice of material stuff should be “conspicuous”, “logoficated,” and “loud” enough to communicate one’s wealth and riches (Bagheri, 2014; Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). According to Galehbakhtiari and Hasangholi (2015), this behaviour shows that consumers think of their consumption as a way to demonstrate their status and prepare the way for them to advance to the desired social classes. Consumers then, become more materialistic and attempt to fulfil extrinsic goals by accumulating possessions that serve as markers of their financial success (Grotts & Johnson, 2013; Segev et al., 2015).

Consumers often use the acquisition of material goods to convey the intended meanings they want to communicate about themselves. Consuming material stuff symbolises one's identity, worth, and appearance. This causes consumers to engage in symbolic or existential consumption, in which they use material objects to “stand out” and be visible in society (Hudders et al., 2013; Kauppinen-räsänen et al., 2018; Latter et al., 2016). Due to the belief that material object is a social status instrument, consumers tend to avoid or approach things either could damage or boost one's self-esteem (Banister & Hogg, 2004).

In reality, the luxury brand market created by the “keeping up with the Joneses” phenomenon (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Leibenstein, 1950) encourages consumers wanting to “own” more individuals nearby because fashion denotes social identification (Noesjirwan & Crawford, 1982). As fashion emphasises certain trends that are “in” for a short time and then, quickly faded (Juggessur & Cohen, 2009), consumers believe that fake brands offer an economical option to stay “in trends” in order to be recognised by others (Gentry et al., 2006; Large, 2014; Priporas et al., 2015). According to Priporas et al. (2015), although economic conditions are unfavorable, consumers are “smart” in looking for economical-image maintenance to stay “in trend” via counterfeit goods. Instead of spending “extravagantly” on quickly out-of-date items (Ahuvia et al., 2013; Amaral & Loken, 2016; Jae Kim & Johnson, 2014b; Phau et al., 2001; Pueschel et al., 2016; Thaichon & Quach, 2016), the counterfeit market empowers consumers to make knowledgeable decisions and follow the trendy look within a budget (Perez et al., 2010).

Among the determinants of consumers' attitudes and intentions of purchasing counterfeit goods is the perception of the values of counterfeit items, which connote cheap price and commensurate quality (Ting et al., 2016). The finding is consistent with another study's result that suggested counterfeit goods' perceived values increased during economically challenging times (Nordin et al., 2013). Malaysian consumers have grown up with the mentality to be wise in spending money optimally, thrifty and prudent in searching for the best deal. To satiate material desires while protecting their social standing, consumers frequently purchase counterfeit goods to impersonate the lifestyles of others (Nordin et al., 2013). Teo and Mohd Yusof (2017), revealed that Malaysian consumers' attitudes regarding

upholding their social status are a crucial subjective factor that drives them to purchase counterfeit items.

Consumers are compelled to look for luxury brand alternatives as normative influence urges them to belong to a group that values material ownership (Harun et al., 2020; Thurasamy et al., 2003; Ting et al., 2016). Consumers in Malaysia are prone to acting in accordance with social norms because it is a collectivist nation. The influence of social groups on one member's purchasing behaviour is significant, which explains information susceptibility has a strong effect on customers' propensity to buy fake items (Ting et al., 2016). As Thurasamy et al. (2003) found that public and private usage may influence others' opinions, although information susceptibility showed no discernible relationship with customers' purchases of counterfeit music compact discs. Consumers might reduce psychosocial risks by choosing things that demand greater social exposure by basing their decision on the opinions of others before choosing a luxury brand (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Phau & Teah, 2009).

Malaysia has lately been identified as a Southeast Asian country that is preferred for counterfeiting activities, along with Vietnam and Thailand (Sloan, 2012). Instead of having to compete with supplies, the Malaysian counterfeit industry has grown to a remarkable RM464 million in commercial value because of increased consumer demand (Nik Hashim et al., 2018). The Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (KPDNHEP) carried out raid operations that seized a variety of categories of branded fashion goods, including clothing, bags, wrist watches, and shoes worth about RM1.6 million (Malay Mail, 2020; The Star, 2020; The Sun Daily, 2020). Despite these initiatives, Malaysia is regarded as a shopping haven for "deal hunters" who are looking to buy branded luxury goods at affordable costs that are simple to acquire through unregistered businesses, licenced businesses, and internet marketplaces (The Malaysian Reserve, 2020). Ting et al (2016) claimed that Malaysian consumers don't bother where products are created as long as they can live the lifestyle that the counterfeit brand represents. Malaysia's anti-counterfeiting initiatives, therefore, put a greater emphasis on taking phoney goods off the shelves and out of circulation. Specifically, this study addresses the following objectives

- i) To explore the role of social media towards consumers' conspicuous lifestyle
- ii) To investigate how conspicuous lifestyle motivate consumers to engage in counterfeit fashion consumption
- iii) To discover how consumers give a meaning on their involvement in counterfeit fashion consumption

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Media and Conspicuous Lifestyle**

According to preliminary surveys, young consumers utilise social media platforms, namely Instagram, to seek fashion inspiration, which affects their purchasing decisions (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Krause et al., 2019). Accordingly, the social media platform encourages users to exhibit their material possessions, which breeds envy (Wang et al., 2017) and, thus contributes to social comparison (Krasnova et al., 2015; Krause et al., 2019; Wenninger et al., 2019). Additionally, previous research has shown that social media promotes conspicuous consumption, a tendency among society's members, by raising consumers' self-esteem (Widjajanta et al., 2018).

Due to the disclosure of users' lifestyles, the social media landscape enables users to be "aspired and inspired". Social media provides a platform for consumers to publicly display

their loyalty to a brand in their daily lives, revealing their opulent lifestyles, encouraging status-based consumption, and a culture of display that signifies a glamorous lifestyle and status (Efendiolu, 2019). Consumers are therefore lured to the premium brand that best represents their social standing and position. The purchase of luxury products consequently promotes ostentatious, status consumption and compulsive buying behaviour (Otero-lópez & Villardefrancos, 2015; Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012; Razmus & Pal, 2017; Shao et al., 2019; Truong et al., 2010; Truong & McColl, 2011). In fact, the anticipation of social rewards from the possession of material objects, which consumers believe improve self-esteem (Goldsmith et al., 2011), denotes non-autonomous behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Otero-lópez & Villardefrancos, 2015; Truong et al., 2010). People often use material possessions that project their social identity to brag about their accomplishments in life, which boosts self-esteem (Hudders et al., 2013; Oxoby, 2003; Truong et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2015) and explains why they engage in this material consumption activity.

Consumers, on the other hand, think that social media are self-enhancement tools that allow them to "filter" and retain positive self-views while shielding them from any damaging and unpleasant ones that would put their self-views in danger (Zheng et al., 2020). Consumers select the "loud brand" because it is more noticeable to others and they believe social media platforms allow them to boost their self-esteem and hope to earn tremendous attention from others through it. This encourages them to consume publicly (Widjajanta et al., 2018). Status-seeking consumers prefer a "loud brand" that has the element of conspicuousness, enhancing consumers' social position, status, and sense of self-identity, self-esteem, and self-worth because it is noticeable and can be seen by other members of the social group (Bagheri, 2014; Janssen et al., 2017; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2018). Consumers thus confirmed that "loud brands" are responsible for their psychological advantages, thus social media networks act as an instrument to attain those psychological rewards. Thus, it is evident that the presence of social media networks aids in nurturing and encouraging consumers to behave ostentatiously, which has previously been criticised as illogical and senseless consumption patterns (Efendiolu, 2019; Thoumrungroje, 2014).

### **Consumer Motivation and Counterfeit Brand**

From the perspective of motivation, numerous analyses have highlighted the causes and underlying factors for consumers' engagement in non-deceptive counterfeit purchasing. Studies have focused on investigating the determinants of counterfeit brands (Bian & Moutinho, 2009; Fernandes, 2013), the influencing factors of consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions (Phau et al., 2009, 2015; Riquelme et al., 2012), as well as consumers' attitude and willingness to buy counterfeit products (Furnham & Valgeirsson, 2007; Phau et al., 2013; Swami et al., 2009). The results showed how social variables play a significant influence in either promoting or discouraging consumers from using counterfeit goods.

Social adjustment is closely correlated with high social expressiveness and compels people to safeguard their social standing, status, and reputation among other social group members (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013; Mazzocco et al., 2012; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Teah et al., 2015). Previous research has shown that the desire to fit in and be accepted by the aspired social group had a significant impact on consumers' opinions and inclination to buy counterfeit items (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Sharma & Chan, 2017; Viet et al., 2018). Jiang and Shan (2016) found that consumers choose to buy knockoffs rather than the Shanzai brand because they thought that doing so would help them "save and keep their face" in their social circles.

According to research by Khandeparkar and Motiani (2018), socially expressive customers choose brands that can portray their social status, and these "fake purchasers" are more likely to reject a brand when they realise that doing so could put their social standing at risk. In this instance, consumers are more likely to purchase a knockoff of the brand because they perceive it to be more important to their social identity and more powerful the brand image (Jiang & Shan, 2016; Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Quintanilla et al., 2010).

Studies have also shown that consumers are driven to buy knockoffs of premium products because they can boost their sense of identity, self-worth, and self-image (Peng et al., 2013; Perez et al., 2010; Phau et al., 2009, 2013; Priporas et al., 2015; Stoner & Wang, 2014). Consumers are smart in taking advantage of the excellent quality of reproduction of the physical attributes of the counterfeit version (Key et al., 2013), thereby reaching the desired self-image and appearance. Consumers feel by flaunting their phoney goods, may reconstruct their desired image (Phau et al., 2009, 2013; Teah et al., 2015), and social identity (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Bian et al., 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). The great quality of imitations, which also influences buyers' opinions and desire to purchase counterfeit luxury brands, results in these symbolic benefits (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015; Key et al., 2013; Pueschel et al., 2016).

Extrinsic goals have been identified in the research on the acquisition of counterfeit items as the primary motivator for consumers to engage in counterfeit consumption. Consumers acknowledged that a luxury brand's identical tangible attributes (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Large, 2014; Staake et al., 2009) allowed them to pursue extrinsic life goals with little effort (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). The urge to mimic the lifestyles of the aspirational group justifies consumers' motivation to purchase counterfeit brands (Phau et al., 2009; Phau & Teah, 2009; Teah et al., 2015; Viet et al., 2018). Consumers learn a lot about counterfeit branded luxury goods to reduce the psychosocial hazards associated with utilising the counterfeits (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016).

Similar research on consumers' incentive to buy luxury brand counterfeit products from the social media component of conspicuousness, explaining consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption, served as the basis for this study. Previous articles have emphasised that consumers who engage in counterfeit consumption do so for cost-saving reasons that allow them to maintain a positive reputation and level of popularity (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Bian et al., 2015; Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Priporas et al., 2015; Pueschel et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). Prior research has shown that consumers connected fake goods with subpar images, putting their mental health at risk and endangering their social standing (Moon et al., 2018; Zaichowsky, 2000). However, another piece of literature claims that social media, which is known for its user-generated content, has a great impact on consumers' purchase intentions of knockoff luxury fashion brands (Morra et al., 2018). Consumers can customise their desired self-image and identity on social media networks because they can control, choose, and filter the messages they want to present and share (Zheng et al., 2020). This reduces the psychosocial risks of being caught buying fake fashion items and leads to self-enhancement (Pueschel et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010). In order to understand how consumer use social media networks for counterfeit consumption, it is necessary to examine the role of social media from the perspective of consumers' actual experiences.



## Methodology

Phenomenology is used to explore the significance of consumer engagement in counterfeit consuming behaviour because the study is exploratory. Phenomenology offers further insights from real-world consumer experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), thus, able to explain why consumers are aggressively involved in the growing desire for counterfeit goods. In order to comprehend the informants' viewpoints on their lives, experiences as reflected in their words, and insights that infuse meaning, a semi-structured in-depth interview was performed with them (Seale & Silverman, 1997).

The researchers used a purposive and snowballing sampling technique, conducting a total of twelve in-depth interviews with participants—six men and six women. They were identified by the researchers as young adult consumers, aged 20 to 33. The informants were selected according to predetermined criteria. The informants must have used and purchased counterfeit fashion items for at least two years, which means they must have done so over the past six months. This criterion, which describes consumers' concerns, interests, or dedication to a certain perspective on counterfeit consumption, is crucial in characterising consumer engagement (Freedman, 1964). The informants for this study were shoppers who bought knockoffs of well-known brands of handbags, sunglasses, clothing, watches, purses, scarves, telekung (women's Muslim prayer clothing), shoes, slippers, and sandals. These types of fashion goods were found to be the most commonly imitated in the literature (Berita Harian, 2020; Koay, 2018; New Straits Times, 2018; Star, 2021; Ting et al., 2016). The researchers identified some well-known Muslim brands that have been widely imitated and sold in Malaysia, including Naelofar, Bawal Exclusive, Duck scarves, and Siti Khadijah, for female scarves (hijab) and telekung (Berita Harian, 2016; Harian Metro, 2018; Malaysia Gazette, 2019; New Straits Times, 2018). Each in-depth interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and was audiotaped by the researchers.

Between May 2018 and October 2018, the researchers gathered data over six months while conducting interviews in the informants' preferred places.

The researchers became familiar with a few phrases throughout the interview, such as "grade," "premium," "high-quality," and "copy-ori," which referred to branded counterfeit items, whose built meanings were derived from cultural values. The researcher paid close attention to the context to determine whether the informants' responses related to their experiences buying and utilising real or fake fashion items. The researchers also encouraged the informants to discuss their emotions and their experiences using and purchasing knockoffs of well-known brands throughout the interview sessions. In this study, the meaning of consumption experiences was explored, and the informants may express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with both genuine and counterfeit fashion goods. It gave the researchers a deeper understanding of the driving forces behind consumers' ongoing participation in this counterfeit consumption.

Thematic analysis was used in this study to identify and explore underlying meanings in a particular dataset, is adaptable to meet the requirements of numerous investigations, is simple to use, and provides rich and thorough data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

The three researchers discussed each emerging theme to provide a comprehensive viewpoint. The interchange and discussion of interpretations helped the researchers define and redefine the direction of analysis. In order to determine the primary themes and subthemes, the researchers looked at the categorization of data and comparisons between the informant's accounts.

The informants were all given a briefing by the researchers regarding the goal of the interview and their role in this study. Concerning "consent and ethical approval," the researchers voluntarily collected a signed consent form from each participant to conduct the study. The researchers explained to them that when reporting and disseminating the data, their rights and interests were crucial. The researchers kept the individuals' identities and other sensitive information confidential and used pseudonyms to try and conceal the identities of the participants. The researchers kept safe all pertinent records, data and information, and only the researchers had access to them. They stored completed documents in an archive for three to seven years in a safe place.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Four main themes emerged related to the consumer's involvement in counterfeit fashion goods; inadequacy, showing off, dedication, and branded value buy reflected the role of social media in promoting counterfeit fashion goods purchase in order to impress society's members that practicing conspicuous behaviour.

#### **Theme 1: Inadequacy**

**Social media networks have a strong grip on consumers and surround them, which creates a sense of scarcity and deprivation for the newest branded fashion items. The following excerpt describes how internal conflict encouraged the informants to keep purchasing and adorning new collections of counterfeits due to daily social media exposure.**

"If I feel like "Gosh, once I saw it, I'd survey in Instagram, even when I have money, but I still think that it may be too early (to purchase... 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" ..." (Informant 1)

"I found it on Facebook. When I was just scrolling and scrolling, and I found it. He said that it was a first copy items shop. So I looked at it... I just wanted to have more (collection) but rarely wore them. The pair of shoes was of the same model and design, except for the material." (Informant 2)

#### **Theme 2: Showing Off**

**The informants were drawn to buying and wearing knockoff "loud brands," emphasising the "logofication" lifestyle, according to the themes of showing off. They spoke of their satisfaction and pride in showcasing the most well-known companies to the general audience.**

"... simply put, we want to show off, "I have it, and you don't." So that's all. I am more for it. It feels like I got left behind. All my friends have it; I do not. It feels wrong. I feel like, "I'm outdated." It is a trend to show off everything we buy ..." (Informant 3)

"Since now we have Shopee platform, I prefer buying from there. This is especially for the first copy goods as the price is lower than personal shoppers and Instagram... Then, I captured the photo. Someone asked me, "Is it original?" "It looks like original." So, it might look original, but for us, we know that it is not." (Informant 4)

**Theme 3: Branded Value Buy**

The depiction of cheap pricing that characterised the quality of the money spent by the informants gave rise to the notion of branded value buy. Social media networks allow the consumers to pick the best stores that deliver lower prices in satiating their material needs by having the brand's preferred design and collection. Accordingly, the similarity of physical characteristics of both original and counterfeit versions drives the informants to "show off" their fake material belongings on social media, leading to consumer satisfaction in participating in counterfeit consumption activity.

"I enjoy it because it was cheap. The brand is still the same. For example, when we took a photo and uploaded it in Facebook and Instagram, it precisely the same with the original one... So I felt satisfied." (Informant 5)

"I scrolled through Instagram and noticed that the price was quite low and affordable. So, I had wanted to try and buy it. I purchased it due to price and design factors. I was satisfied because I could purchase six pairs of shoes by spending only RM600. This is how I started thinking about purchasing first copy goods; mainly due to the low cost." (Informant 6)

**Theme 4: Dedicated**

The dedicated theme described how social media networks help consumers minimise financial risk and post-purchase dissonance in searching, collecting and evaluating the online stores that sell counterfeit branded fashion goods

Consumers were prepared to invest more time and effort in searching for the most accurate and excellent quality imitation of branded counterfeit fashion items. Although the pre-purchase process is laborious and drawn out, the informants said that most of them thought it was worthwhile and were satisfied with it.

".... I was following a lot of Instagram (pages), I looked into the price, and what they offered. For example, free postage. I read reviews... For those with low-income level, they have to search for information by browsing Instagram pages to find something affordable. Thus, it was okay to spend some time." (Informant 6)

"I read the review given by others. Then, I searched the hashtag for a personal shopper or AAA grade. Later, I found those hashtags, looked into the followers, and looked into the feedback when they bought from there. It took some time too; to search and to survey for about one to two weeks... If I bought the goods online, I will need to look at the review also. First, I would just employ the trial-and-error method and read all the reviews from others. There are also many review blogs if we want to buy first copy goods. Then, I looked into Instagram pages." (Informant 4)

**General Discussion**

Investigating the consumers' consumption experiences helped to confirm that the social media environment of the consumers' daily life was what drove them to engage in counterfeit consumption. Social media platforms enable users to share their everyday lives and routines, particularly in the fashion industry, which has an aspirational effect and inspires users to buy certain products (Efendiolu, 2019). Therefore, showing off one's "extravagant" lifestyle causes others to feel deprived whenever they see new designs, collections, or trends on social media, leading to "a feeling of missing."



The theme 'inadequacy' refers to consumers' sense of deficiency, which makes it "essential" for them to buy and use the new design or collection to avoid regretting having missed such an excellent opportunity. People who are struggling financially and trying to satisfy their frantic want to buy "new fashion" suffer this uneasy sense. As a result, people turn to fake items to get rid of their negative sensations like regret, resentment, melancholy, and unease (Ertekin et al., 2020).

Despite feeling shortchanged, consumers refrained from overspending or engaging in splurging. To keep their interest in using branded fashion items with little outlay, they gave in to counterfeit consumption. The informants acknowledged that buying name-brand clothing did not signal their social standing but rather that they kept up with the newest styles, trends, and brands. Consequently, consumers were caught in an internal conflict between wanting to keep up with the fast-changing fashion trends and managing their spending power (Ertekin et al., 2020). Due to the abundance of information such as reviews on social media networks, consumers might satisfy their sense of lacking in branded fashion goods and avoid post-purchase dissonance by overpaying on these short-lived fashion items.

In this study, informants expressed regret about missing the chance to shop and purchase the well-known brand they wish to wear. The overpaying that results from purchasing the original brands lead to self-guilt. According to Rosenzweig and Gilovich (2012), this guilt is a reflection of both action and inaction, with consumers often feeling guilty for not taking the opportunity to "do" the activity with others rather than "having" the material possessions. In contrast, Chen et al (2015) asserted that consumers face social disgrace if others discover their purchases of counterfeit items. This inconsistency relates to social norms that internalise thriftiness and "deal seekers" beliefs. These norms encourage consumers to spend less money while yet enjoying fashion items by choosing knockoffs and labelling themselves as wise consumers. Society's support of this consuming practice and the ability for consumers to internalise these ideas, rather than worrying about psychosocial consequences, shows how consumers' engagement in counterfeit consumption is widely accepted.

The "showing off" theme illustrates how material possessions can be used as a means of showcasing one's identity, group membership, and self-image. The informants talked about how they needed to maintain their lifestyle, culture, and social standards, which is why they acted in a braggadocio-like manner to impress others. Consumers asserted that the behaviour of displaying material possessions was widespread among society's citizens and allowed them to feel a part of and connected to others. The informants revealed that every compliment and piece of feedback they received after flaunting their knockoffs of well-known brands of clothing as giving them a strong sense of satisfaction, pride, and success. The results demonstrated that consumers adopted a visible lifestyle in order to uphold social conventions, impress others, and attain status within the targeted social group by choosing the right brands (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

No doubt, social media network becomes an instrument for an individual to pursue their extrinsic life goals. An individual's ability to construct the desired self-image, trigger envy in others (Johnson & Ranzini, 2018), and win people over leads to self-interest behaviour (Fu et al., 2017) as the content of the post create and controls by oneself.

Additionally, consumers can feel good about themselves and be associated with others by joining the throng in consuming fashion and trends, which helps them to feel good about themselves and improves their self-image (Wallace et al., 2020). This suggests that the values of our society, which place a high value on material possessions, have created a culture of

flaunting, which has encouraged consumers to engage in counterfeit consumption. As a result, this category of conspicuousness highlights how the behaviour of showing off one's material possessions in social settings enhances one's life and fosters a strong sense of affiliation and connection with the other members of society.

The theme 'dedicated' demonstrates how social media networks contribute to the free information on knockoff brands of clothing that come in different grades and quality ranges, which requires users to invest a lot of dedication in the decision-making process. In this study, consumers claimed that each stage of information seeking and evaluating various classes of counterfeit items resulted in some hedonic rewards in terms of excitement, entertainment, pleasure, and contentment. Instead of thinking that their time and effort were being wasted, they thought that the prolonged process would increase their understanding of the branded clothing items that attract them. Even though consumers preferred lower prices over high quality, which required constant effort and time to find the "finest" grade to minimise flaws (Nik Hashim et al., 2018), the consumers in this study confessed that intensive information search process involvement resulted in knowledge expansion by teaching them more about knockoff and genuine branded fashion goods. This is consistent with prior research that found that involvement in the decision-making process determines the complexity of cognitive behaviour (Hashim et al., 2018), which fosters self-competence abilities and autonomous behaviour (Evans et al., 2013). In line with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), self-autonomous are strongly associated with one's self-competence. When an activity is a choice, self-initiated, and unaffected by pressure or coercion from others, people are more likely to be dedicated to it and driven to complete it. As a result, this will enhance their skills, and knowledge, thus, individuals become competent in the activity they involve in as they gain self-achievement and satisfaction. Deci & Ryan (2000), mentioned that both autonomous and competence needs are crucial as components of basic psychological needs and indicate how are humans functioning.

With regards to this study, consumers prefer to shop and are looking for the greatest deals, so they may excuse their actions as being self-initiated because they have a strong desire to learn more about branded clothing items. As they passionately want to learn about all branded fashion items, and the specifics and technical components of counterfeit products, past studies have also verified that consumers were autonomously involved in the consumption of counterfeit goods (Bian et al., 2016; Key et al., 2013).

The theme of "branded value buy" describes how easily buyers can afford to pay for name-brand labels. It explains how consumers were keenly aware of the value they received for their money, which calls for significant consumer input in deciding which products and services offer the highest value (Wiedmann & Hennigs, 2017). According to the literature, consumers who are concerned about paying low prices, and subject to some quality restrictions, are more likely to purchase counterfeit goods than those who are not (Eisend & Schuchert-guler, 2006; Phau et al., 2013; Phau & Teah, 2009; Staake et al., 2009; Teah et al., 2015; Wilcox et al., 2009). As a result, pricing has a key influence on what consumers buy (Batra, 1997), making them price-sensitive. The informants expressed their happiness with the inexpensive cost of the sought branded fashion items without having to pay a lot of money. Quintanilla et al (2010) also found that consumers who buy counterfeit goods considered doing so to be an intelligent use of their resources and efficiently utilising the existence of this illicit market.

They acknowledged that, despite buying the original branded items, it is still worthwhile to spend money on the same ones. The informants felt content with their possessions after

purchasing and wearing the knockoffs since the "affordability" issue helped them realise how much their money was worth. The cheap cost, accessibility, and monetary value were the main focuses of the informants' satisfaction, which highlighted how they were highly concerned with their financial decisions and expected to get good value from even their smallest purchases.

The informants found buying counterfeit goods as a way to get a less expensive replica of the desired brand and hence enjoyed wearing the exact same copied item. These consumers were able to satisfy their craving for low-cost, branded clothing through the purchase of counterfeit items (Phau & Teah, 2009; Priporas et al., 2015; Swami et al., 2009; Teah et al., 2015). The informants acknowledged that the urge to wear name-brand clothing and "show off that their things were original" drove their engagement in counterfeit consumption. To avoid the post-purchase dissonance after spending a lot of money on the original branded fashion items, they were proud to acquire knockoffs. The informants admitted that their buying decision was "worth it" after engaging in counterfeit consumption and characterised themselves as wise.

According to Quintanilla et al (2010); Bian et al (2016), consumers claimed to utilise the existence of counterfeit markets that offer the best bargain within their financial means. These findings could be explained further through cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), as consumers were fully aware that the quality of counterfeit versions was far behind the original, and still compensating that their decision to purchase was good enough. Cognitive Dissonance Theory Festinger (1957) highlighted that when there were inconsistencies of cognitions, psychologically, consumers will have discomfort or dissonance feelings. Thus, to meet these inconsistencies of cognitions, consumers might try to "excuse" themselves by altering their contradictory beliefs on the inferior image and quality of counterfeit goods to justify their purchase as the best deal and bargain.

All of the emerging themes highlight the roles of social media platforms in encouraging consumers' conspicuous behaviour which inspire them to buy counterfeit versions of well-known brands.

As a result of consumer interaction on social media that encouraged the "showing off" behaviour, consumers had to do a thorough information search to satisfy their material wants for fashion and brand. Contrary to premium brand consumption, consumers did not feel compelled by their material belongings because the hazards associated with "showing off" their counterfeit branded clothing on social media are reduced. These consumers may now learn about many counterfeit product grades on social media, making it easier for them to choose the best quality and grade that is equal to the name-brand product. This study showed how the development of social media networks, as opposed to psychosocial deconstructions, allowed consumers to shop around for the greatest deal while remaining loyal to a brand without disclosing their preferences to others (Chen et al., 2015; Fastoso et al., 2018; Kim & Johnson, 2014a; Pueschel et al., 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to better understand how social media platforms that encourage flashy behaviour motivate people to buy knockoffs of well-known brands of clothing. Conclusion verified four emerging themes that described various ways in which social media became tools for consumers to "show off" their material possessions, significantly contributing to the consumption of counterfeit goods. This study recommended promoting a fresh viewpoint in studies of counterfeit goods, especially among young adult

consumers in Malaysia. The prevalence of counterfeit consumption will probably continue to be a serious concern for the legal fashion items business, based on the level of consumer awareness on this issue in Malaysia. Therefore, if society endorses the conspicuousness behaviour and "logofication" culture, which encourages counterfeit consumption behaviour, it indicates a worrying trend, particularly among the local fashion entrepreneurs.

In this study, researchers have the challenge of convincing consumers to share their consumption experiences and views. Hence, an alternative ethnographic or netnographic method could be employed to explore further the phenomenon of counterfeit in social media communities among teenagers. Both approaches use extensive observation to give reliable data. Additionally, participating in community engagement can help one gain a thorough grasp of that culture, especially in communities that engage in counterfeit consumption.

In order to educate and enhance awareness of the importance of intellectual property to Malaysia's economy, targeting youngsters and teenagers as respondents is vital as these segments of consumers value "showing off" behaviour on social media networks, which contributed to unhealthy societal norms and values. As a result, consumer involvement resulted from recognising other people's material possessions. Social media networks enable users to experience greater psychological benefits and social need fulfilment rather than feeling uneasy and exposed to psychosocial hazards.

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