

The Role of Counterfeit Consumption on Consumers' Psychological Needs Satisfaction

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Abstract

Consumer demand has been a leading cause for the mushrooming counterfeit markets, and thus these dark markets pose the greatest challenge for luxury brand manufacturers in preventing consumers from participating in counterfeiting activities. This paper, which was based upon a hermeneutic phenomenology study, sought to uncover a rich and contextualised account of 7 consumers' consumption experiences on the purchase of counterfeit branded fashion goods through in-depth interviews. The phenomenological approach was used to probe into 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 using thematic analysis, and six themes emerged from this study; sharing information, trusted sources, social learning, adept, discernment, and deceiving, which unravelled the role of counterfeit consumption in psychological needs satisfaction. This study contributes knowledge to the area of counterfeit branded fashion goods and consumer behaviour as the emerging themes that describe the actual experiences captured from the consumers who were continuously involved in the counterfeit consumption practice. This research contributes to scholarly and managerial knowledge in the Malaysian context through more insights into comprehending the underlying causes of counterfeit consumption phenomena.

Keywords: competence needs, counterfeit consumption, phenomenology, psychological needs, relatedness needs

1.0 Introduction

Consumer demand has been a leading cause of the mushrooming counterfeit markets (Bian et al., 2016; Eisend et al., 2017; Eisend & Schuchert-güler, 2006; Gistri et al., 2009). These dark markets pose the greatest challenge for luxury brand manufacturers in

preventing consumers from participating in counterfeiting activities. The literature depicts the role of consumer demands, apart from the 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 as a deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeit purchase (Grossman & Shapiro, 1998). Deceptive counterfeit purchase occurs when consumers lack the knowledge and information to distinguish the counterfeit from the original goods (Gino et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2018). On the contrary, non-deceptive counterfeit purchase reflects the 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 purchases 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, economy, and authentic fashion goods industry (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015; Kim & Johnson, 2014a; Teo & Mohd Yusof, 2017). The Executive Director of the Asian Trade Centre, Deborah Elms, asserted that education and consumer awareness are effective weapons to combat counterfeiting activities as consumers need to be aware that they are responsible for the development and survival of the counterfeit market (The Edge Financial Daily, 2018). Similarly, Teo and Mohd Yusof (2017) highlighted the importance of education and awareness programmes 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.

Recently, Malaysia is one of 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.

According to Karen Abraham, co-head of the Intellectual Property practice group at Shearn Delamore & Co, the Malaysian Government has taken plenty of initiatives in organising anti-counterfeiting programs. Nonetheless, despite those initiatives, Malaysia is recognised as shopping heaven for “bargain hunters” who seek affordable branded luxury goods that can be easily accessed from unregulated outlets, registered stores, and online platforms (The Malaysian Reserve, 2020). The rationale for buying counterfeit goods from legal and registered stores as an acceptable practice should be corrected, as consumers are completely aware that such practice is indeed illegal and unethical (Teo & Mohd Yusof, 2017). Similarly, Ting et al. (2016) pointed out that Malaysian consumers lack self-honesty in their consumption activity, which explains they do not care about the origin of products in pursuing their desired lifestyle status represented by the counterfeit brand. Therefore, the anti-counterfeiting programmes implemented in Malaysia are more concerned about removing counterfeit goods from the shelf and the market.

Numerous studies in Malaysia have adopted the quantitative approach to predict consumers’ attitudes and purchase intentions towards counterfeit goods (Bupalan et al., 2019; Harun et al., 2012; Mohd Noor et al., 2017; Mohd Nordin et al., 2013; Nordin, 2009; Quoquab et al., 2017; Thurasamy et al., 2003; Ting et al., 2016). These studies revealed that Malaysian consumers weighed their self-integrity before deciding to involve themselves in counterfeit consumption activity. Certainly, integrity, which is linked to ethical aspects, would deter one from purchasing counterfeit goods (Quoquab et al., 2017). Additionally, Teo and Mohd Yusof (2017) revealed that consumers violated their integrity by justifying that purchasing counterfeit goods from legal and registered stores is acceptable but lacking self-honesty in their consumption activity (Ting et al., 2016), which explained consumers highly involved in counterfeit consumption activity.

2.0 Literature Review

Past studies on counterfeit consumption have identified status, esteem, self-image enhancement, and affiliations among the psychological needs that consumers wish to fulfil through the consumption of counterfeit goods (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Bian et al., 2016; Peng et al., 2013; Phau & Teah, 2009; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Radon, 2012; Teah et al., 2015). Consumers believe that the characteristics of counterfeit goods with high duplication of genuine products deliver similar values. Therefore, they can enhance consumers' self-esteem and image during the socialisation process (Jiang & Shan, 2016; Peng et al., 2013). Through counterfeit consumption, consumers have a second chance to reconstruct their identities with counterfeit goods, which can enhance their self-esteem (Quintanilla et al., 2010). In addition, consumers earn respect and recognition from others by "mimicking" the lifestyle of high social class (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015; Pueschel et al., 2016; Teah et al., 2015) besides helping consumers with low self-esteem and inferior feeling to minimise self-discrepancy (Peng et al., 2013). Indeed, consumers thoroughly assess the benefits of counterfeit consumption activities before deciding to involve in this consumption practice (Rod et al., 2015). Consumption behaviour should deliver inherent meaning to consumers, which they believe will contribute to their well-being and quality of life.

2.1 Relatedness Needs

Social groups are an integral factor that affects consumer engagement in any consumption behaviour (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Eisend & Schuchert-güler, 2006; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Zhang & Kim, 2013). Hence, consumers are eager to be accepted by the other social group members due to the construction of social identity, enabling them to share their passion with others indulged in similar consumption activities (Evans et al., 2013; Park, 2012).

Particularly, consumers purchase counterfeit goods because they want to be connected with their desired social group (Stoner & Wang, 2014; Taormina & Chong, 2010; Viet et al., 2018). By doing so, consumers satisfy their affiliation needs as it creates an affectionate relationship with the aspired social group (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Bekir et al., 2013), thus illustrating the importance of fulfilling psychological

needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 2001). Although the means are unacceptable (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Zaichkowsky, 2000), the existence of counterfeit goods enables them to sustain their social position together with the others (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016).

Through counterfeit consumption activities, consumers form strong bonds and affiliations with a “secret group” (Bian et al., 2016) in order to be protected by other group members in keeping their “face” (Jiang & Shan, 2016) as well as sharing a similar feeling with others who are discriminated by luxury brand manufacturers and consumers (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Kim & Johnson, 2014; Marticotte & Arcand, 2017; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). In this case, the role of a social group is vital in minimising guilt and insecurity as consumers gain strong support from other social group members (Bian et al., 2016). As a result, affiliation and self-belonging needs spark online counterfeiting communities (Key et al., 2013) that serve as points of reference for consumers seeking information on selected counterfeit brands (Radon, 2012).

Key et al. (2013), in a netnographic study, found that consumers who were involved in online counterfeiting communities voluntarily complied with the group norms, apart from displaying their concern to other members by sharing reliable information and knowledge about counterfeit goods. Literature asserted that online community members have educational roles, as they are responsible for changing a consumer’s perceptions of certain products when making purchase decisions (Kelley & Alden, 2016; Luo et al., 2016). Information provided by the social group members plays an essential role in consumers’ perceptions, attitudes, and purchase decision-making.

Similarly, Phau and Teah (2009) claimed that as counterfeit consumers lack knowledge and information on counterfeit goods, they seek experts’ opinions among their social group members regarding purchase decision-making. In this context, social group members rely on others’ opinions and peer-to-peer communication to select the best quality of counterfeit goods, minimise financial risks, and be caught by experts in the possession of counterfeit goods (Bian et al., 2016).

2.2 Competence Needs

Competence needs are related to the effectiveness of individuals in challenging themselves to demonstrate skills and knowledge of performing an activity (Kasser et al., 2014). As a result,

individuals are bound to experience self-growth and development, which indicate a sense of self-achievement (Lee & Pounders, 2019; Pugno, 2008; Webb et al., 2013).

As consumers become knowledgeable and 'experts' in selecting the best grade of a counterfeit luxury brand, they become wiser in utilising the existence of the counterfeit market (Quintanilla et al., 2010). Counterfeit knowledge enables high social class consumers to camouflage their social identity by 'blending' the use of original and counterfeit versions (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016). Spending money minimally to obtain similar tangible characteristics of an original fashion brand without being caught by the others illustrates the competency amongst consumers in carrying themselves before the social group members (Bian et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). Consumers feel competent as they become experts and skilful in selecting the best quality of counterfeit branded fashion goods and being able to avoid any psychosocial risk.

The involvement of consumers in counterfeit consumption requires high skills and ample time to select and compare the qualities of the various grades of the counterfeit goods, which to some extent, can be more challenging than purchasing original branded fashion goods. Key et al. (2013) found that although consumers afford to purchase the luxury brand, these 'detail consumers' are intrinsically motivated to learn the technical details and 'know-how' of counterfeit versions. Consumers that recognise their extensive involvement enable them to display their skills, knowledge, and expertise on the various categories of counterfeit products, and to some extent, they are recognised and placed at the top of the counterfeit consumers' product hierarchy (Bian et al., 2016).

On the contrary, some studies revealed that high product involvement deterred consumers from getting involved in counterfeit goods purchases (Bian & Moutinho, 2009; Viet et al., 2018; Zaichkowsky, 2000) as they become more concerned about the psychosocial risks and the consequences of counterfeit branded fashion goods (Penz E, 2005; Wiedmann et al., 2017). Perhaps, it could be assumed that different motivational orientations produce different psychological outcomes for the consumers. Thus, intrinsically-oriented consumers experience positive psychological benefits, while extrinsically-oriented consumers receive negative psychological outcomes.

Given the rising prevalence of consumer psychological benefits, it is integral to explore the components of psychological needs to comprehend the phenomenon of counterfeit consumption. As depicted in the counterfeit goods purchase literature, consumers are extrinsically motivated to involve in the counterfeit consumption as it is a cost-saving alternative, which helps them to preserve a favourable image and 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). The literature reckons the role of intrinsic motivation that portrays how consumers experience a high sense of self-autonomous due to their genuine interest and passion for learning and enhancing knowledge on counterfeit products, thus improving self-competency (Bian et al., 2016; Key et al., 2013).

Despite the extensive research work, many aspects of consumer consumption are still untapped from the stance of psychological benefits and their contribution to the consumer's lived experience. In order to reduce the consumers' demand for counterfeit fashion goods, it is crucial to understand the "real-world experiences of the consumers" (Levy et al., 2005), the actual reasons, and what they seek in this unethical consumption practice. It is worth mentioning that exploring consumers' psychological needs satisfaction (Abdulrazak & Quoquab, 2018; Gilal et al., 2019) can shed light on the phenomenon of counterfeit consumption activity.

3.0 Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of the study, phenomenology is applied to understand the meaning behind consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption behaviour. Phenomenology provides more insights from the actual consumers' real-life experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and thus is able to explain the increasing demand for counterfeit goods from their continuous involvement. A semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted to allow the informants to talk freely, which was "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 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. 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, which lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. 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/brands
1. Jenna 33 years old Female Entrepreneur	10 years	YSL, LV, Prada, Chanel handbag, purse, belt, sunglass
2. Johan 33 years old Male Officer at a government agency	15 years	Adidas, Fila, Levi's wallet, watch, slippers, apparels
3. Nadia 28 years old Female Executive	8 years	Coach, Givenchy handbag, Siti Khadijah Telekung, Naelofar hijab
4. Eddie 20 years old Male Sales promoter	3 years	Adidas, Supreme, Vans shoes, bag, apparel

The Informants	Years of consumption experiences	The most frequent purchase of counterfeit fashion goods/brands
5. Arman 22 years old Male University's student	5 years	Adidas, Nike shoes, jersey
6 Akim 22 years old Male University's student	7 years	Nike, Adidas, Puma shoes, jersey, Casio watch
7 Atie 22 years old Female University's student	2 years	Guess, Michael Kors handbag, purse, Naelofar hijab

The researchers collected data for 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 in 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 were attentive to the context to identify whether 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 study, 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 is 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. The researchers 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 enabling the researchers to work on 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 the main 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, which might potentially be 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.

To allow for a holistic perspective, the three researchers discussed all emerging themes. 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.

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.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Six main themes emerged related to the consumer's involvement in counterfeit fashion goods; sharing information, trusted sources, social learning, adept, discernment, and deceiving reflected involvement in counterfeit consumption contribute to consumers' psychological needs satisfaction.

Theme 1: Sharing Information

Most consumers found counterfeit consumption as a platform to exchange information, thus enabling them to share and learn how to differentiate various grades of counterfeit branded fashion goods. These socialisation and interaction processes allowed them to enhance their knowledge in selecting the best grade of the counterfeit version. For consumers with a high interest in collecting and wearing branded fashion goods, their satisfaction is derived from the ability to share and exchange useful information about the trends and

demanded brands while hanging out with others. Hence, consumers involved in counterfeit consumption could satisfy their relatedness needs, as stipulated in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), since the existence of this social group provides social support for each member who shares similar interests and activities (W. Chen & Lee, 2013). This counterfeit consumption activity enabled the “expert” consumers who were extensively involved in buying and selling activities to demonstrate their knowledge of both categories of branded fashion goods to others. Bian et al. (2016) discovered the existence of a counterfeit society, which had created a “secret group” of which the consumers were proud to be part of the group. Regardless of the nature of consumption activity - ethical or illegal - consumers found that involvement in this counterfeit consumption gave an avenue for them to be connected and affiliated with others who shared the same consumption activities, thus enabling them to satisfy their relatedness needs.

“I have a lot of friends with similar hobbies, and we do have two or three WhatsApp groups on these shopping activities ... From there, I will know which one is the original and the first copy version...” (Johan, age 33)

“... If I hang out, I will ask since many of my friends work in the original, first copy, and premium shops ... Although they sell first copy and premium goods, they wear the original goods. Of course, they will wear the original ones.” (Eddie, age 20)

Theme 2: Trusted Sources

When the consumers revealed how they gained access to information on the counterfeit branded fashion goods, they pointed out that the sources of information were credible. The theme of trusted sources describes the influence of social group members, which served as a point of reference in assisting others’ purchase decision-making. They admitted that they were not too “well-verse” in seeking the best grade of counterfeit branded fashion goods, thus sought opinions and recommendations from ones they could trust. The consumers described their satisfaction with the performance of counterfeit branded fashion goods recommended by these trusted sources, which they believed were credible. Consistent with prior

studies, the consumers sought opinions from others to minimise psychosocial and financial risks, thus regarding them as points of reference (Phau & Teah, 2009; Radon, 2012).

“...They will share through Facebook and Instagram to those who wish to purchase (information) it. Then, she will tag us. I’ve trusted them; the quality was adequate for me...” (Nadia, age 28)

“...A lot of my friends purchased shoes from him. I used to buy one or two pairs of shoes from him. When there is a new design, he will update us.” (Arman, age 22)

Theme 3: Social Learning

The social learning theme describes how consumers’ involvement in counterfeit consumption contributes to their relatedness, affiliation, and self-belonging needs. It represents the willingness of the social group members to exchange information and time to “educate” as well as share valuable information for the benefit of the other members. For instance, the social group members exerted great influence on consumption practice, whereby they were transparent in revealing the status of their branded fashion goods. The social group members were willing to share and reveal where they purchased and recommended the place to others. In fact, some consumers sought opinions when they travelled to another destination, in this case, Hong Kong, about where they should shop for counterfeit branded fashion goods. Accordingly, Bian et al. (2016) reported that the location of a substantial illegal counterfeit industry could create consumer norms. The existence of counterfeit consumption enables consumers to share not only information on product categories but also the best destination to shop and purchase counterfeit branded fashion goods.

“...I have many VVIP friends. Sometimes, even the VVIPs do not go to the boutique because the goods are expensive. They know the high-quality items (first copy goods) in Hong Kong. They recommended that I go to Hong Kong.” (Jenna, age 33)

“Because I was going with my aunt, she was familiar with it. She went to almost 30 countries. So she knew it. She knew how to go to places, such as Hong Kong, here, and there; from my aunt (information).” (Nadia, age 28)

Most consumers learnt how to evaluate and select the best grade of counterfeit branded fashion goods through personal observation while performing shopping activities with others. This counterfeit consumption served as a platform for the consumers to learn, exchange opinions and ideas as well as enhance the socialisation process. According to Salazar et al. (2013), people gain information from their observation which is surrounded by their social circle consumption practice and later make-up cognitive learning. Therefore, the integration of both observation and cognitive learning generates reliable information to assist the consumers’ purchase decision-making process. Furthermore, people can learn new information and behaviour by observing other people. When the consumers observe the others on how to evaluate, select, and differentiate various grades of counterfeit goods while shopping together, they use observational learning and imitation, which affect the consumers’ attitude in both cognitive and affective dimensions (Chen et al., 2017). The diffusion process of information is more active in a social group as those involved in counterfeit consumption can use and demonstrate their knowledge of counterfeit goods that have been regarded as resources gained during the socialisation process.

“...Sometimes when I buy a jersey with my friends, I realise when there is a situation where they will say “Why are you not letting me buy that shirt (jersey)? “You can see how the material is.” Then, I can gain more (information).” (Akim, age 22)

The consumers in this study confessed that their involvement in counterfeit consumption was primarily determined by their interest in wearing the latest design and trend of branded fashion goods. The existence of the counterfeit market had gathered a group of consumers with similar interests and consumption practices, which then created a sense of “togetherness” and affiliation. Instead of feeling alienated and frustrated with their inability to wear the desired branded fashion goods, this social group had contributed strong social support by gathering

more consumers that shared similar consumption practices. Additionally, when the consumers were strongly attached to others, the relationship offered emotional kinship, trust, and social support that made the relationship more valuable (Phua et al., 2017), thus contributing to consumers' psychological benefits. For example, consumers who always share their inability to pay for the original branded fashion goods often gained social support and were guided by other social group members who were more knowledgeable on how to purchase the desired branded fashion goods.

Theme 4: Adept

The theme 'adept' portrays how competent consumers used their vast knowledge and skills in counterfeit branded fashion goods by 'producing' their own "version" of branded fashion goods that did not exist in the market. Hence, these consumers were skilful in minimising the flaws when selecting the best grade of a counterfeit version without being noticed by the others. As a result, counterfeit consumption enabled them to showcase their skills and knowledge in branded fashion goods, and thus the description as competent leads to self-satisfaction. This theme was also noted by Key (2016), who discovered the presence of online counterfeit communities, which enable consumers to experience self-competency as they were passionate about learning the technical details of counterfeit luxury watches.

"I would like to wear a boy band T-shirt, but it is expensive. So, I bought the ready-made ones from a printing company in Malaysia ... My friend, who does customisation, works in the printing field. He had customised this two-tone T-shirt according to my size ..." (Johan, age 33)

"... I bought the premium grade for RM230. The low-grade first copy was about RM60-RM70, but it used different materials, glue, sole, and stitches even though the Adidas logo was similar to the original one. When I wear it, others will think that I'm wearing the original. "It's original," they said." (Eddie, age 20)

Theme 5: Discernment

The informants expressed their satisfaction in participating in the overall process of evaluating, selecting, and purchasing counterfeit branded fashion goods. The process is time-consuming and demands extensive knowledge about the original branded fashion goods. One with vast knowledge of both versions can compare, differentiate, and select the most identical copy and high-quality counterfeit branded fashion goods. It describes the level of determination among the consumers to commit to the tedious process of evaluating the various grades, which require a high sense of judgement in selecting the best counterfeit branded fashion goods. The improvement of quality and various categories of counterfeit goods in the market requires a high level of consumers' involvement in assessing and selecting the best grade (Xuemei Bian & Moutinho, 2009; Hashim et al., 2018). In fact, the more intense consumers' involvement is, the more discerning the consumers will be, thus leading to the satisfaction of competence needs. Bian et al. (2016) denoted that consumers tend to purposely exert their expertise on counterfeit goods to others as they believe that demonstrating their expertise in counterfeit goods enhances their competence needs.

"The differences between Uptown and premium goods are the material and the design whether it is printed or stitched depending on the circumstances ... When we gaze at it, we will know that "It is a Danau copy"; it works like that." (Eddie, age 20)

"... The leather material was different, and it was comparable with the ones we bought in Malaysia for RM50. The item worth RM50 was too rough. When we compared it with the high-grade one, the leather was softer, and the workmanship seemed excellent. It correctly mimicked the original ..." (Jenna, age 33)

"... When I see someone wearing it, I can differentiate it. From the workmanship, colour, and fabric, we could see from there actually ... We can differentiate it because we are familiar and know all the things." (Johan, age 33)

Counterfeit consumption activity is more challenging than purchasing the original branded fashion goods as the consumers must be more cautious and detailed in searching for minimal flaws to ensure that the item is identical to the original branded fashion goods. If the physical characteristics of the counterfeit deviate too much from the original version, consumers will be exposed to negative psychosocial risks (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Phau et al., 2001). The consumers in this study believed that due to the high exposure to psychosocial risks, it is more challenging to involve in counterfeit consumption activity. Counterfeit consumption requires consumers to be more discerning in making purchase decisions. The informants added that they experienced self-growth enhancement by acquiring vast and 'forensic' knowledge on either the original or counterfeit branded fashion goods.

"... I have to try first, then I will know it. I have to compare it with the original one too ... After trying both, I learnt the differences. I wanted to know the quality. I wanted to look into it by myself; I wanted to feel (wear) it. Then I know how it differs ..." (Atie, age 22)

Theme 6: Deceiving

The theme of deceiving illustrates how consumers described themselves as smart and experts in convincing others about the state of their branded fashion goods. They confessed that the inability of the social group members to detect the status of their branded fashion goods boosted their confidence in deceiving others. The ability to compare, contrast, evaluate, and select the best grade or high quality of counterfeit fashion goods demands high skills and knowledge to become a successful counterfeit buyer.

"... Usually for the first copy products, one has to look into the zip ... The original uses the YKK. But recently, the first copy goods do not use YKK. So, one of the ways to differentiate the original and first copy products is by looking at the YKK." (Johan, age 33)

"... If they ask, I tell them that I bought it in Hong Kong. I mentioned the name of the place, but not the shop that sold it. So, when I am wearing it, it's fine, I do not feel guilty or afraid." (Nadia, age 28)

Consumers in this study experienced self-mastery in both versions of branded fashion goods, original and counterfeit, which they experienced self-enhancement through this consumption activity. The consumers in this study asserted that they enjoyed the whole process of the counterfeit consumption activity as they could use their expertise along with the extensive knowledge gained from their continuous involvement in this consumption activity. Instead of feeling inferior to those using the original version, these consumers described themselves as competent, especially when another person reckoned their skills and knowledge in branded fashion goods. Accordingly, consumers experienced self-image enhancement by having extensive 'forensic' knowledge about branded fashion goods of both versions, thus placing them on the top hierarchy of counterfeit consumers by their peers (Bian et al., 2016). As a result, such consumers become knowledgeable and wiser in utilising the counterfeit market (Perez et al., 2010; Thaichon & Quach, 2016) in which they become very confident and feel competent to camouflage their self-identity by 'blending' the use of original and counterfeit versions before others (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016; Teah et al., 2015). In this sense, carrying oneself before others while using counterfeit branded fashion goods without being caught describes the competency of the consumers in selecting the best quality and grade of counterfeit goods, enabling them to avoid any psychosocial risk.

The findings describe the consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption activity, which 'produced' competent consumers as they experienced self-enhancement by acquiring extensive knowledge about both versions of branded fashion goods. The consumers explained how they used the counterfeit market to spend their money wisely by preventing wasteful and splurging consumption. The consumers in this study represented the society's belief, which remarked spending money on original branded fashion goods is unworthy. Consumers are viewed as wise when they can use the counterfeit market without spending lavishly just to be "in-vogue" for a short time (Gentry et al., 2006; Pueschel et al., 2016; Quintanilla et al., 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2017). The consumers internalised the values of seeking the best deal as well as bargaining to keep up with the trend and fashion emphasised by the society.

Additionally, the findings discovered how this counterfeit consumption acts as a platform for creating a strong social network, thus leading to the satisfaction of relatedness needs as highlighted in

self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The accumulation of learning through the knowledge-sharing process among the social group members turned into a valuable resource for those involved in counterfeit consumption activity. The consumers felt connected and affiliated with others who had similar interests, activities, and consumption practices in which they felt that they were not being alienated and this satisfied their relatedness needs. The findings are in line with the literature that found consumers created a strong bond with a “secret group” (Bian et al., 2016) and felt secure with the protection of group members in “keeping their face” (Jiang & Shan, 2016). Several studies revealed that sharing the same consumption practice, such as counterfeits that have been criticised as immoral, unethical, illegal, and inferior image, had gathered consumers “discriminated” by luxury brand consumers and manufacturers to share their unpleasant feeling and to gain social support (Francis et al., 2015; Kim & Johnson, 2014; Marticotte & Arcand, 2017; Moon et al., 2018; Thaichon & Quach, 2016).

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This article endeavoured to understand how consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption activity leads to psychological needs satisfaction. The findings reported six main themes revealed that consumers were interested in learning new things about counterfeit goods and gradually enhanced their self-competence and self-growth from the experiential learning process. Such consumption activity led to competence needs fulfilment, and interestingly, the consumers were connected with the others – sharing similar consumption practices and feeling interdependence on each other. This study proposed to inspire a novel perspective in the realm of counterfeit studies, especially among young adult consumers in Malaysia. By looking at the level of Malaysian consumer awareness on this issue, there is a possibility that counterfeit consumption will maintain and evolve to be a severe problem for the legitimate fashion goods industry. Hence, it establishes a worrying trend, uniquely among the local fashion entrepreneurs, if society approves the counterfeit consumption behaviour.

Although the researchers anticipated the challenge of convincing counterfeit consumers to share their consumption experiences and thoughts, an alternative ethnographic or netnographic method was suggested among the teenagers in the future study to understand the counterfeit community that has existed in our society.

Moreover, both methods provide highly reliable data through comprehensive observation. Thus, participating in community interaction can develop an in-depth understanding of the community culture, particularly counterfeit consumption communities. Since intellectual property rights are crucial to Malaysia's economy, targeting youngsters and teenagers as respondents is vital to formulate and intensify awareness to protect Malaysia's future economy. Ergo, the role of a social group in legitimising counterfeit consumption practice motivates consumers to sustain their involvement in counterfeit consumption. Instead of feeling insecure and exposed to psychosocial risks, consumers perceive this consumption activity, enabling them to be affiliated with others, contributing to psychological needs satisfaction.

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