

An Exploratory Study: Illuminating the Effects of Counterfeit
Products on the Image of Luxury Brands

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Abstract

This study explores how counterfeit products negatively affect the image and reputation of luxury brands. Counterfeiting is a growing issue that undermines consumer trust and weakens the perceived value of luxury goods. It creates confusion between authentic and fake products, damaging the exclusivity and relationship with luxury brands. This research looks at social and psychological factors behind counterfeit consumption, including consumer motivations and ethical concerns.

To conduct this investigation, the study used secondary data gathered from existing academic articles, theses, and books. A narrative literature review was used to collect and bring together relevant studies, giving a clear overview of the current knowledge on the topic. Thematic analysis was then applied to identify common themes and patterns within the literature, allowing the study to construct a framework that captures the wide-reaching effects of counterfeiting on the luxury industry.

The findings show that both producers and willing consumers play a role in the ongoing spread of counterfeit goods. This dual contribution makes the problem more complex, as some consumers knowingly purchase fake items to access the appearance of luxury at a lower cost. Such behaviour continues to threaten the authenticity and emotional value of luxury brands. To reduce the impact of imitation goods and preserve their brand image, luxury companies should focus more on raising public awareness, ensuring product transparency and improving security features. These strategies are essential for maintaining consumer trust and protecting the unique value that luxury goods represent.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgement), nor used artificial intelligence tool or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated and referenced along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research explores how counterfeit products influence the image of luxury brands and affect consumer perceptions. The chapter begins with the background to the study before introducing the research question and aim, and then it explains the significance and rationale of the study and describes the approach to the study. It concludes by providing an overview of the dissertation structure, and its clear definition of the key terms employed throughout the research.

1.2 Background to the Study

Counterfeiting has often been referred to as the world's second-oldest profession. In recent years, it was estimated that counterfeit activities cost the global economy over USD 3 trillion annually, while trade in fake and pirated goods accounted for 3.3% of all global trade, which is approximately 509 billion (USD) (Butt et al., 2023). Although precise data on the harm purchasing counterfeit products causes are limited, the problem continues to pose significant economic, social, and safety challenges worldwide (Feeney et al., 2024).

Counterfeiters continue to exploit vulnerabilities in global trade, particularly where legitimate branded luxury goods remain expensive, while illicit alternatives are easily accessible because of weak enforcement and widespread informal markets (Tunçel, 2022). The risk of counterfeit products entering the market is amplified by the slow adoption of blockchain verification and traceability systems across many e-commerce platforms (Li et al., 2024). The challenge is further intensified by evolving distribution strategies, including reliance on online marketplaces, small market shipments and tactics that involve sending unassembled components or packaging materials to assemble counterfeit products close to their destination markets (Wang et al., 2020). Such practices hinder enforcement efforts by making it increasingly difficult to trace products' origins, verify authenticity and intervene at critical stages in the supply chain (Gayialis et al., 2022).

Despite ongoing countermeasures, the fundamental risks and market drivers that have been previously identified remain largely unchanged, and counterfeit trade continues to threaten global economic stability, consumer safety, supply chain integrity, and brand value (Ghadge et al., 2021; Razmus et al., 2024). These risks emphasise the importance of understanding what makes luxury products desirable to consumers, as counterfeiters imitate the very

qualities that make luxury appealing; therefore, it is important to understand what consumers value in a luxury product (Goor et al., 2020). This makes it essential to understand what consumers consider luxurious.

Luxury means different things to people. For some, it is about owning items that show quality, rarity, and refinement, such as watches, jewellery, or designer clothes (Ko et al., 2019). For others, luxury is found in experiences such as fine dining, travel, or high-end technology (Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022). When we define luxury, it is important to consider the qualities people associate with it, such as authenticity, craftsmanship, heritage, and the emotional meaning behind the product (Lin & Ku, 2023). Because consumers see these traits, classifying an item as premium or truly luxurious, and thus influence willingness to pay and the overall purchase decisions (Dryl, 2022). Luxury has a complex side: while it promises excellence and status, it can create uncertainty for consumers when fake luxury goods enter the market (Goor et al., 2020). What sets luxury apart from regular or mass-market products is that it offers a combination of exceptional quality, exclusive heritage, and symbolic and emotional value, while also fulfilling social and psychological needs like self-expression and status (Ko et al., 2019; Amaral, 2020).

However, the status of luxury is increasingly under threat because of counterfeit goods, overpowering the brands and weakening their connection with both the company and consumers. These goods provide similar status symbols at a much lower price and can change how consumers perceive luxury, making it harder for luxury brands to protect their value (Amaral, 2020; Chand & Fei, 2021). Counterfeiting does not just harm the brand – it can also be linked to illegal activities and broader social issues (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017). With luxury goods becoming easier to access online, the counterfeit market is growing, making it harder for brands to maintain their reputation and for consumers to trust what they buy (Varela et al., 2021). To tackle these challenges, it is important to understand how consumers behave and what they expect from luxury today (Kowalczyk & Mitchell, 2022). By gaining insights into how consumers perceive products and what they expect from a luxury offering, brands can improve their products and experience in a way that aligns with consumers' expectations, enhancing satisfaction, trust and loyalty (Wang et al., 2024).

Understanding the impact of counterfeit products is important because it highlights the serious challenges luxury brands face in maintaining their image, reputation, and consumer

trust (Song et al., 2021). Counterfeiting not only affects the exclusivity and perceived value of luxury items but also influences consumer behaviour and contributes to wider issues, such as job losses and links to organised crime (Wang et al., 2023). Investigating these effects helps to explore how counterfeit consumption shapes attitudes towards authenticity, brand loyalty and trust (Razmus et al., 2024).

1.3 Research Question and Aim

This study chooses the underpinning theory of Keller (1993) to understand brand equity and customer perception towards luxury brands. Keller's customer-based brand equity model focuses on how customers' knowledge and image of a brand influence their responses. By applying this theory, this study seeks to examine how counterfeiting affects brand equity and customer perception within the luxury sector. This study aims to examine how counterfeit products affect the image of luxury brands and consumer perceptions by analysing existing literature through a narrative literature review. The research question for this study is:

How can a narrative literature review illuminate the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands?

1.4 Significance and Rationale of the Study

The significance of this study has arisen from the growing challenges luxury brands face as counterfeit goods become more widespread and influence how consumers perceive them (Saviani & Grover, 2023). Understanding how elements such as brand experience, trust, and resonance affect consumer behaviour is crucial for luxury brands that want to maintain loyalty and protect their value (Husain et al., 2022). Moreover, the study provides insights that can guide decisions for brand managers in mitigating the impact of counterfeits (Bian & Haque, 2020). Luxury has long been associated with beauty, exclusivity, and social status; however, behind this glamorous image lies a complex reality. In today's globalised marketplace, luxury is increasingly challenged by the growing presence of counterfeit products (Khan et al., 2021; Ko et al., 2019). These imitations blur the line between authentic and fake, reshaping how consumers perceive the true value and identity of luxury brands (Song et al., 2021). This research seeks to illuminate the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands (Saviani & Grover, 2023).

Although previous studies have examined consumer attitudes toward counterfeit products, fewer have investigated how these products influence the image of luxury brands themselves (Srisomthavil & Assarut, 2018; Wu & Zhao, 2021; Ligaraba et al., 2024). For many consumers, brand image represents not only a symbol of status but also a promise of quality and authenticity. When counterfeit versions flood the market, they threaten this promise, potentially eroding trust and diminishing the exclusivity that defines luxury (Khan et al., 2021). Understanding this relationship is important to both academics and brand managers, as it provides a foundation for developing effective strategies to protect brand equity, strengthen consumer trust, and uphold the symbolic value of luxury products (Bian & Haque, 2020), which is derived from perceived rarity and exclusivity, allowing brand managers to design strategies that reinforce brand prestige and loyalty (Saviani & Grover, 2023; Husain et al., 2022).

This rationale has arisen from a limited understanding of how counterfeit luxury goods affect consumers' perceptions and behaviour in complex market conditions (Khan et al., 2021). While some studies have explored aspects such as consumer motivation for purchasing counterfeits or emotional attachments to brands, few studies have examined the combined influence of brand perception, trust, and consumer-brand interactions in minimising the effects of counterfeiting (Purwanto et al., 2019; Bian & Haque, 2020). By addressing this gap, the study provides a foundation for both theoretical development and practical guidance for brand managers seeking to protect brand integrity in the presence of counterfeit products (Shan et al., 2021; Islam & Murshed, 2024).

1.5 Approach to the Study

Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the practical challenges in gathering primary data, a qualitative research approach utilising secondary data was chosen (Bian et al., 2016; Mazhar et al., 2021). This involved analysing existing academic literature through a narrative review, allowing for a flexible and thematic exploration of relevant studies within the limited timeframe (Ferrari, 2015; Greenhalgh et al., 2018). The methodology is framed within the interpretive paradigm, emphasising the exploration of multiple perspectives (Davies & Fisher, 2018). A focused literature search using specific keywords and Boolean operators to identify relevant peer-reviewed sources, which enabled screening for relevance and quality literature was utilised (Bramer et al., 2018; Jaffe & Cowell, 2014; Snyder, 2019). Thematic

analysis was employed to identify and organise key themes across the reviewed literature, providing an understanding of the effect of counterfeit products on luxury brands (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Ferrari, 2015). Overall, the chosen methodology enables an investigation into the social aspects of counterfeiting within the luxury industry by using qualitative methods.

1.6 Outline of the Study

This dissertation is structured into six chapters. After Chapter One, the introduction, the content is organised as follows.

Chapter Two presents the literature review with the fundamental concepts of luxury and the defining features of luxury brands. This chapter builds on these ideas by exploring some of the less visible aspects of luxury. It also considers the digital platforms, evolving consumer behaviours, and the enabling of the spread and distribution of counterfeit products across different markets. The chapter gives a clear picture of the challenges faced by the luxury industry today.

Chapter Three provides the research methodology, which employs a qualitative approach through a narrative literature review. This method involved an examination of relevant academic studies to investigate how counterfeit products effect the image of luxury brands and affects consumer perceptions. A thematic analysis was used to identify key themes that are presented in Chapter Four and discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study examining how counterfeit goods affect both the image of luxury brands and influence consumer perceptions. Through thematic analysis, seven themes emerged: brand relationships and marketing strategies, psychological and motivational drivers, consumer attitudes toward counterfeits, purchasing behaviours, perception of luxury value, the structure of the counterfeit market alongside anti-counterfeiting measures and the role of social influence and self-presentation in luxury consumption.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings identified through the narrative literature review presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter Six is the conclusion, presenting a summary of the findings and highlighting the issues. It also offers practical suggestions for luxury companies to protect their brand reputation, including consumer education, awareness campaigns and the use of secure digital authentication methods. Finally, it emphasises the need for ongoing innovation and responsibility within the industry.

1.7 Scope and Terms of Reference

To support the clarity of this study, it is important to outline the key terms that will be used throughout the discussion. Defining concepts such as luxury, luxury brands, consumers, and counterfeit products helps establish the scope of the research and ensures a consistent understanding.

Luxury

Luxury refers to products or experiences characterised by exceptional quality, refined craftsmanship, and exclusivity, which together convey prestige and desirability among consumers (Devanathan, 2023).

Luxury Brand

Luxury brand denotes a product's unique identity and distinctive features, which influence consumers' perceptions of value and guide their purchasing decisions (Xi et al., 2022).

Consumer

A consumer is an individual who purchases products or services based on factors such as brand reputation, quality and price. Consumer preferences vary, with some individuals prioritising high-quality products at lower prices, while others are willing to pay a premium for branded items that offer perceived superior value (Goedertier et al., 2024).

Counterfeit

Counterfeit refers to duplicates of original products created to generate profit through unethical means. These products are deliberate imitations of authentic goods produced without the consent of the right holder, designed to closely resemble genuine items and avoid intellectual property rules (Wu & Zhao, 2021).

Dark Side

The dark side refers to the negative aspects of luxury, such as unethical practices and consumer manipulation (Sipilä et al., 2021). More broadly, the dark side of luxury encompasses the social, psychological and ethical consequences that can arise from luxury consumption, including engagement with counterfeit luxury consumption (Razmus et al., 2023).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review begins by defining luxury, exploring its meaning, perceptions and experiences it provides to consumers. The review then discusses luxury goods and consumption, focusing on their social, psychological, and symbolic significance, as well as the role of conspicuous consumption in motivating purchases. Following this, it addresses counterfeiting, considering counterfeit products, consumer motivations and the impact of brand authenticity and brand worth. The review then explores the role of digitalisation in expanding counterfeit luxury goods and concludes with the ethical, regulatory, and social implications of counterfeiting, including labour issues in the illicit production networks. This chapter reflects a logical progression from understanding luxury and brands to examining the challenges posed by counterfeiting in the modern market. The review critically examines the theoretical framework and empirical studies relevant to this research. This study is underpinned by Keller's (1993) theory, which provides a framework for understanding brand equity and customer perception towards luxury brands, and it focuses on how customers' knowledge and image of brand influence their responses. By applying this theory, this study seeks to examine how counterfeiting effects brand equity and customer perception within the luxury sector.

2.2 Defining Luxury: Concepts and Meaning

The concept of luxury encompasses multiple interpretations and nuances, varying according to individual perceptions and societal influences that affect consumer attitudes and preferences towards luxury products (Xi et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2024). This diversity of meaning raises a fundamental question: What is luxury, and how does its significance evolve across different individuals and societies?. Luxury combines high pricing, exceptional craftsmanship and intricate design elevated by creativity and artistic value, which sets it apart from standard products (Roberts, 2020). Luxury is seen as a personal experience defined by the perceptions of individuals who experience it (Gummerus et al., 2024). It is also reflected in unique, differentiated offerings such as products and services (Devanathan, 2023).

Luxury can be understood as something that goes far beyond normal standards, basic needs, or usual limits, whether in a material or immaterial form (Wang, 2022). It is often linked to feelings of independence, being special, admirable, powerful, and impressive, as well as

experiencing enjoyment and pleasure (Wiedmann, 2021). There are many definitions of luxury: for example, it can be defined by its attributes, such as authenticity, which is associated with genuine origin, true craftsmanship, heritage, and the emotional or personal meaning a product holds for a consumer (Ko et al., 2019; Fuentes et al., 2023). However, defining luxury depends on the situation and the person; there is no single universally accepted definition of luxury as people value different things based on their culture, income, experiences and personal preferences (Slaton & Pookulangara, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Luxury is a multifaceted concept that includes exceptional quality, exclusivity, and symbolic value, and its meaning varies across individuals and cultural contexts (Ko et al., 2019). The concept of true luxury is different for every individual (Sun et al., 2024). But there are individuals for whom true luxury means a purchase that signifies quality, refinement, and rarity (Petravičiūtė et al., 2021). Consumers may view luxury as a tangible item like an expensive watch or a piece of jewellery, or in more intangible forms like fashion or clothing (Ko et al., 2019; Wang, 2022). For others, food, alcohol, hotels, travel, or any technology product will provide them with a luxury experience (Bellaiche et al., 2010; Gupta et al., 2023). Ultimately, the luxury experience is formed by the brand rather than the product alone, as the brand influences how consumption is perceived and experienced (Rather et al., 2024; Husain et al., 2022). Understanding luxury brands and what sets them apart from ordinary brands is important because these differences influence how consumers perceive value, quality, and status (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2022). Having explored the meanings and concepts of luxury, the next section will now examine how luxury brands create value through brand identity, image, and equity.

2.3 Brand Identity, Brand Image, and Brand Equity

A brand can be described as a name, term, symbol, design, or a combination of these elements used to identify the products or services of a particular seller or a group of sellers and to distinguish them from competitors (Acar et al., 2024). These individual components are called brand identities, and together they make up the brand (Jingcheng et al., 2023). The basic principle, according to Keller (1993), is that brand knowledge determines brand equity. Brand knowledge consists of brand awareness, which refers to how easily a brand comes to mind or is recognised, and brand image, which includes the mental connections and perceptions linked to the brand in memory, such as their strength, favourability, and

uniqueness (He, 2022; Büyükdağ, 2021). The role of brand knowledge in consumer decision-making has been well documented (Ling et al., 2023). Understanding the content and structure of brand knowledge is important because it shapes what comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a brand, for example, in response to marketing activities, and ultimately influences evaluations, choices and loyalty (Hyun et al., 2024; Liu, 2022; Gao, 2019).

Brand identity, brand image and brand equity are central to understanding how consumers assign value to luxury brands (Keller, 1993). According to Keller (1993), brand equity draws its strengths from consumers' perception, allowing brands to create value in multiple ways. This idea is known as consumer-based brand equity, which expresses that the worth of a brand depends on how consumers see it. A brand is identified by its name, symbol, and unique patterns and design elements. Its value and price are shaped not only by these features but also by how the brand is positioned and perceived in the market (Acar et al., 2024). This occurs because brand positioning and consumer perceptions influence how much value consumers assign to the brand and how much they are willing to pay (Fatma & Khan, 2024; Joshi et al., 2023). These perceptions are foundational to customer-based brand equity (Sohaib et al., 2023; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021).

Brand image is widely recognised as a central concept in marketing, though it lacks a universally accepted definition (Tahir et al., 2024). It refers to the perceptions that consumers hold about a brand, shaped by their ideas, experiences, and feelings about it (Mehra & Jain, 2021). These connections act as informational links to the brand and convey its meaning to consumers (Batra, 2019). The positivity, intensity, and distinctiveness of these impressions play an important role in shaping brand knowledge, influencing how consumers respond to the brand and contributing to brand equity, especially in high-involvement purchase decisions (Hyun et al., 2024; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021). When consumers buy a product or service, they are also buying what a brand represents. Maintaining a strong brand image is essential because it helps a company gain credibility within its industry (Xi et al., 2022). This credibility is earned through quality, consistency, and honesty, leading to respect from both consumers and competitors (Cuong, 2020). Brands can achieve credibility in many ways, such as being truthful with customers, providing expert insights into their products or services, responding to customer feedback, addressing problems promptly and fairly, and

transparently comparing their offerings with those of competitors, all of which reinforce a positive brand image (Sansome et al., 2024; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Visentin et al., 2019). Additional credibility is gained by becoming a leader in the industry, protecting the customer information, maintaining a strong focus on quality and making responsible decisions regarding social issues (Mansour et al., 2022). When a brand is open and trustworthy in its operations, consumers are more likely to perceive it as credible, which can lead to increased purchases and stronger consumer support (Alhosseiny & Nabih, 2024; Nosi et al., 2021).

When customer-based brand equity is strong, it translates into tangible outcomes, such as brand reputation, trust, loyalty and long-term value creation (Sürücü et al., 2019). An excellent reputation is developed through consistent value delivery and positive customer experiences, which promote customer trust and create loyalty (Chernev, 2020). As a result, repeat business and higher client retention occur because customers feel confident in the quality and reliability of a trusted brand (Masengu et al., 2023). Satisfied clients often become brand ambassadors, spreading the word about the company and enhancing its credibility while reducing marketing costs (Bakhtiari, 2024; Sweeney et al., 2020). A strong reputation can also attract talented employees and earn the trust of investors and other stakeholders because it signals stability, ethical practices and long-term success (Pfister et al., 2020). Companies with a well-established reputation are better prepared to handle crises because stakeholders are more forgiving and supportive, and they are seen as attractive partners for collaboration due to the trust and credibility they have earned (Robson & Farquhar, 2021). Moreover, a strong reputation can help a company save money when gaining new clients and allow it to sell products or services at higher prices (Sun et al., 2024). By addressing ethical, social, and environmental issues, a business can prevent problems and remain successful in the long term (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Focusing on ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability also helps attract more customers, retain skilled employees, stay competitive, and create a respected brand (Chang et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2021).

Keller (1993) proposes a theory for conceptualising, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. The theory explains that brand awareness is about how people know the brand and how easily they can identify or remember it (Keller, 1993). Brand recognition occurs when consumers can tell that they have seen or heard about the brand before, while

brand recall is when they bring the brand to mind from the product category (Runkel & Preuß, 2021). Brand recognition and brand recall both play a role in how consumers decide what to buy (Azlina et al., 2023). Brand association, including attributes, also influences this (Pranata & Permana, 2021). Attributes are the features that describe what a product is or has, including product-related elements such as the materials or components needed for how it functions, and non-product-related attributes like packaging, price or the image associated with the brand (Coudounaris et al., 2024). Brand awareness is the ability of a consumer to recall and recognise a brand (Teng & Huang, 2022; Keller, 1993). Its main objective is to ensure that the brand is the primary focus in the consumer's mind (Keller, 1993). When a counterfeit product emerges, the exclusivity of a luxury brand is threatened, as it can reduce the perceived value associated with the brand (Monreal-Mostrup, 2024). Perceived quality can be considered as whether a brand, from a consumer's perspective, is capable of delivering high-quality products (Keller, 1993). As an intangible perception, it influences how consumers assign value, and some consumers may perceive greater value from luxury brands, as they are associated with higher brand quality (Petravičiūtė et al., 2021). Together, these shape how consumers view and choose the brand (Yang et al., 2024), with the foundational concepts of brand awareness and associations being especially important in understanding consumer perceptions of luxury goods, as they determine how consumers engage with and relate to the brands behind these products, as well as their purchase intentions (Bartoli et al., 2023). With an understanding of brand identity, image, and equity, the attention now moves to the luxury goods themselves and the pattern of consumer consumption.

2.4 Luxury Goods and Conspicuous Consumption

Luxury goods are distinguished by their tangible and creative qualities, which are often rare and exceptional, contributing to their desirability, symbolic value and ability to convey status and exclusivity (Wang et al., 2024). The urge to fulfil these social and psychological needs has influenced the luxury goods market, which reached \$1 trillion by 2014, and also triggered the demand for luxury counterfeit products, providing individuals with access to the luxury brands at a fraction of the cost (Amaral, 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Taylor, 2016). Over 10 years later, the global personal luxury goods market had reached nearly \$346 billion (USD), with conspicuous consumption and status-driven brand prestige being key drivers of consumer behaviour in many developing markets (Chernov & Gura, 2024).

Conspicuous consumption refers to buying and using prestigious products to signal social status and gain recognition from others, often motivating purchases more than personal preference or utility, as individuals who are highly self-monitoring rely on social norms and expectations to shape their sense of identity (Lee et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024).

Conspicuous consumption is usually linked to showing wealth and social status, but it can also serve a compensatory purpose, enabling individuals to cope with feelings of insecurity or low self-esteem by acquiring and displaying luxury goods (Kumar et al., 2022; Reid-Partin & Chattaraman, 2023). The desire for conspicuous consumption is closely linked to luxury brands, highlighting social status, prestige, and symbolic value that motivate these behaviours (Pangarkar & Shukla, 2023). This occurs because luxury brands are widely recognised as makers of exclusivity and success, enabling consumers to communicate their social position and identity to others through visible consumption (Sarsilmaz, 2024). Understanding why consumers seek luxury goods sets the stage for examining the rise of counterfeit products, which challenges brand integrity and consumer perception.

2.5 Luxury Brands and Brand Equity Formation

Luxury brands possess a significant brand image, reflecting how consumers perceive and evaluate them and how these perceptions shape their attitude towards the brand (Ku & Lin, 2018). This image can be positive, representing the brand's reputation and credibility, which enhances desirability and reinforces its status among consumers (Jacob et al., 2020). When a luxury brand attains a strong market reputation through product sales and profit generation, it signals high consumer demand for the product (Ko et al., 2019). Consumers are likely to purchase a sustainable product when it is offered by a luxury brand, because it provides a sense of pride and elevated social status, and they are more willing to engage in luxury product consumption when the product is perceived as valuable and strengthens a positive brand identity (Xi et al., 2022; Osburg et al., 2024). When consumers purchase a product, they engage in an active process of learning about the brand, which helps to shape their expectations (Kankam & Charnor, 2023). This process enables one to feel more informed, connected, confident, and involved, ultimately promoting more positive feelings about the brand (Merdiaty & Aldrin, 2022). These consumers' perception and learning play a critical role in building brand equity, as they shape how value, meaning, and differentiation are assigned to the brand over time (Amer et al., 2023).

According to Aaker (1991), the theory of brand equity explains that it consists of assets and liabilities that are connected to a brand. These elements must be linked to the brand's name or symbol because the brand's value is created through how consumers recognise and respond to them, so if these identifiers change, some of the assets or liabilities may be affected, lost or transferred (Shen & Lin, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2022). The assets or liabilities that form brand equity can vary depending on the context (Biedenbach et al., 2019; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021). One of the important assets within brand equity is brand loyalty, as it directly influences customer retention, repeat purchases, and the long-term value a brand can generate (Mittal et al., 2023). Brand loyalty can be defined as the behaviour shown by customers who prefer the same brand compared to other brands, even when the brand is more expensive or when there are other alternatives available for purchasing the product (Desveaud et al., 2024). There is a difference between brand loyalty and customer loyalty (Singh, 2021). Customer loyalty refers to the connection between a customer and a business, where a strong relationship encourages the customer to repeatedly purchase products from the same company rather than from competitors, even if competitors offer similar or better benefits (Țichindelean et al., 2024; Lyu et al., 2022). A customer who consistently purchases from the same brand usually has an emotional connection with the brand and does not make a decision based only on the price or value (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020). Brand loyalty depends not only on the product itself but also on the overall customer experience and the rewards or benefits gained through repeated purchases (Corbishley et al., 2023). As previously stated, Aaker's (1991), theory of brand equity consists of assets that are commonly grouped into five categories: brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations beyond perceived quality, and other proprietary brand assets such as patents, trademarks, and channel relationships (Širola, 2021; Hoo et al., 2024).

Brands protect their recognition and value mainly through strong brand names, which help prevent competitors from taking away their customer base and loyalty (Keller, 1993). Trademarks are also important because they act as legal identifiers, such as names, logos, or symbols that communicate the brand's quality and maintain consistency, helping consumers make informed choices (Buick, 2023). Counterfeiting, which copies both the product and its trademark, continues to exploit the brand's reputation, image and awareness (Song et al., 2021). Despite enforcement efforts, counterfeit products remain widespread, making brand

names and trademarks crucial for maintaining recognition and consumer trust (Nikita & Devakumar, 2022; Bian & Haque, 2020).

Brand equity helps build customer loyalty by improving perceived quality, creating strong brand associations and increasing brand awareness (Tariq & Ahmed, 2024). These factors make consumers more confident in the brand, less likely to switch to competitors, and they enjoy using the brand more (Zhao et al., 2022). When a brand has strong equity, it can command higher prices and rely less on promotion and expand more easily into new products or markets (Zhu et al., 2021). Together, these elements shape how consumers perceive the brand's overall quality (Sohaib et al., 2023; Banbula, 2024). Brands are also categorised into different types, such as low brands and high brand products (Quamina et al., 2023). A low-brand product is typically manufactured with quality materials and sold at a reasonable price, whereas a high-brand product is made from high-quality materials but is marked at a higher price point (Chatterjee et al., 2023). In the case of luxury brands, the attachment of the term 'luxury' confers exclusivity, transforming the brand into a symbol of value and desirability (de la Ballina & de la Ballina, 2019; Xi et al., 2022). This designation enhances the product's status, making it appealing and worthwhile for consumers who are able to afford it (Wang et al., 2024). Another key dimension of brand equity is consumer loyalty, which influences repeated purchases and long-term value creation.

2.6 Consumer Responses to Luxury Products

A product carries a brand name, and that holds value, making the product recognisable in the market (Qiao et al., 2022). Such recognition represents a significant advantage for business growth and profit generation (Elsayed, 2023). The most identifying features of luxury products are based on the psychological and social needs they satisfy, such as self-expression and social communication goals (Amaral, 2020). Products crafted from highly valuable materials attract consumers not only because of their aesthetic appeal but also due to the originality and exclusivity of the materials employed in their production (Petravičiūtė et al., 2021). Luxury products can enhance perceptions of success and competence (Goor et al., 2020). They may also reduce approachability or likeability (Cannon & Rucker, 2019) and generate feelings of guilt or social tension, particularly when the brands involved are linked to unethical practices or counterfeiting (Wu & Zhao, 2021; Goor et al., 2020). Some people use luxury products to deal with feelings of insecurity or to protect their self-worth, which

shows that luxury consumption can sometimes be driven by emotional need rather than status alone (Hammad & El-Bassiouny, 2024). Understanding consumer responses to luxury products sets the stage for examining how counterfeit products influence perceptions and behaviour.

2.7 Understanding Counterfeit Goods

Counterfeit goods are unauthorised replicas of branded items, often featuring a trademark, and sold on the black market (Eisend et al., 2017). Due to the growing consumer demand and ease of production, counterfeit luxury goods are becoming more common, especially for luxury brands (Randhawa et al., 2015; Wu & Zhao, 2021). The illegal production and sale of counterfeit goods are misrepresented as authentic branded items, which is widely acknowledged as a criminal act, with serious economic and legal consequences (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017). They also harm the brand's value, causing a decline in prestige, and pose a risk to intellectual property rights (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017; Song et al., 2021). Counterfeit goods are illegal and generally of inferior quality, being unauthorised duplicates of original products (Amaral, 2020). Despite this, counterfeit luxury items attract consumers through their designs and symbolic value, often driven by the desire for social status (Li et al., 2020). The widespread sale of counterfeit goods undermines the viability of authorised producers, increasing their risk of existing in the market (Pittiglio, 2023).

2.8 Perceived Quality of Counterfeit Product

Counterfeit products typically utilise inferior raw materials and less advanced technology, resulting in lower quality than authorised goods, which leads to deception (Xu et al., 2024). Counterfeit products can endanger consumers because they are made illegally and therefore do not follow the required safety regulations, often relying on low-quality, unsafe or unapproved materials or otherwise reducing production costs in ways that create health and safety risks (Dhanalakshmi et al., 2019). When consumers use genuine or counterfeit products, different experiences can arise as consumer attitudes and purchase intentions vary depending on factors such as risk tolerance, status seeking and moral values (Eisend et al., 2017). In such circumstances, fake and counterfeit products often become confused with authentic luxury items, undermining the originality and the integrity of the genuine brand, raising critical questions about authenticity, desire and the distinction between genuine and imitation in luxury consumption (Kim et al., 2024). Using a counterfeit product can evoke a

feeling of disgust, which may carry over to a genuine product, resulting in hasty interaction, greater inaccuracies, and decreased confidence, ultimately discouraging repurchase of the product (Amar et al., 2018). Furthermore, low-quality counterfeit products can negatively influence consumers' evaluation of the genuine brand because they create unfavourable quality perceptions and weaken the brand's perceived prestige, which in turn undermines consumer trust and willingness to purchase (Astray et al., 2021). Building on the discussion of perceived quality, the next section explores consumer motivations in purchasing luxury and counterfeit goods.

2.9 Consumer Behaviour Motivations in Luxury and Counterfeit Consumption

Customers purchase luxury brands because they trust the brand and may have had satisfying experiences before. However, when a brand fails to deliver a compelling product experience, customers may withdraw and choose not to make a purchase and potentially turn to competing brands, which can negatively impact the brand's reputation and loyalty (Husain et al., 2022; Hoque, 2024). Luxury brands are not purchased daily, as compared to non-luxury brands, which are bought regularly, which shows that luxury brands are crucial for establishing a brand relationship (Eastman et al., 2020). People often use luxury consumption as a way to express social meaning and signal their status to others (Elena-Iulia, 2020). This naturally leads to the concept of conspicuous consumption, where people buy luxury goods to display their wealth and social status, rather than solely for practical use (Kumar et al., 2022). Consequently, the strong desire for luxury, status and self-affirmation has also contributed to the rise of counterfeit goods as consumers seek an accessible alternative to authentic products (Shan et al., 2021).

2.10 Impact of Counterfeiting on Brand Authenticity and Image

Counterfeiting poses a serious risk to luxury brands as it can harm their reputation, decrease consumer demand for authentic products and require further spending to defend the brand image (Martinsson et al., 2022). The rise of counterfeit goods has created serious financial and reputational risk for brands, as revenue is lost when customers buy counterfeit products instead of the originals (Sun et al., 2023). The presence of fake goods also damages customers' trust in the brand, and over time, they may stop buying it altogether (Ali et al., 2022). When counterfeit products are sold at higher prices and closely resemble the original,

the cost-conscious buyers may be pushed further away from the authentic brand, which weakens brand loyalty (Rasmus et al., 2024; Bian & Haque, 2020).

Conversely, concerns about counterfeit or fake items can generate a negative perception of the brand image, which arises when consumers are aware of the brand but are reluctant to purchase its products, due to fear of inauthenticity (Song et al., 2021). While strong brand desirability and high market visibility are central to luxury branding, they also create opportunities for unethical profit-making, particularly through the production and distribution of non-genuine goods (Khan et al., 2021). In such circumstances, fake and counterfeit products often become confused with authentic luxury items, undermining the originality and the integrity of the genuine brand, raising critical questions about authenticity, desire and the distinction between genuine and imitation in luxury consumption (Kim et al., 2024). These authenticity-related concerns intensify consumer expectations for greater transparency and ethical accountability within luxury brands (Holmqvist & Kowalkowski, 2023).

Consequently, the pursuit of credibility has increased the appeal of sustainable luxury products, which are viewed as more trustworthy and aligned with consumers' value-based expectations (Vock, 2022). Building on this pursuit of credibility, consumers are more likely to purchase a sustainable product when it is offered by a luxury brand because it provides them with a sense of pride and elevated social status, and they are more willing to engage in luxury product consumption when the product is perceived as valuable and strengthens a positive brand identity (Osburg et al., 2024). In addition, the act of purchasing a product engages consumers in an active learning process about the brand, which helps to shape their expectations and enables them to feel more informed, connected, confident and involved, ultimately promoting more positive feelings about the brand (Merdiaty & Aldrin, 2022). Beyond brand authenticity, counterfeiting has broader consequences, which are considered next.

2.11 Economic and Social Impacts of Counterfeiting

Luxury consumption is influenced by consumers' perception and preferences regarding a product. The perceived value of a luxury product often depends on the brand and the consumer's social status (Petravičiūtė et al., 2021). Individuals with high social status may purchase luxury goods without much deliberation, whereas consumers with middle or lower status may find it more difficult to access these products (Chen et al., 2019). This disparity

contributes to the emergence of the dark side of luxury: the production and sale of counterfeit products, as consumers may turn to counterfeit products to achieve social status, often justifying their purchases through moral disengagement (Wang et al., 2019). These counterfeit items are often sold at lower prices and are marketed to make consumers believe they are genuine and made from high-quality materials (Wu & Zhao, 2021). As a result, consumers are misled into thinking they have purchased authentic luxury products (Rasmus et al., 2024). When they realise the items are counterfeit, their trust is violated, highlighting the unethical practices associated with the proliferation of counterfeit luxury goods (Reinhardt et al., 2023), which also affects the brand and society, damaging their reputation, encouraging illegal markets, and linking to crimes (Song et al., 2021; Rosely et al., 2019).

Counterfeiting luxury brands can be harmful to both the brand and society because it damages brand equity, causes job losses, contributes to the growth of the underground economy, and is linked to organised crime and terrorist organisations (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017; Albanese, 2021; Pittiglio, 2023). It generally involves the production and sale of illegally replicated products (Wang et al., 2020) and has become a significant external threat to brands across almost all product categories (Elsantil & Hamza, 2021). Counterfeiting negatively affects business revenue, consumer trust, and the image of luxury brands (Khan et al., 2021).

Within the counterfeit market, two segments exist: deceptive and non-deceptive markets (Bian et al., 2016). Deceptive counterfeits are manufactured using fake materials and sold to consumers who are unaware of their inauthenticity, often attempting to replicate a product's identity, including brand name packaging and price, while potentially posing safety risks (Dobbelstein & Pepuere, 2019). Non-deceptive counterfeits, on the other hand, are knowingly purchased by consumers and are typically low-priced, such as imitation handbags sold for \$20 or printed DVD's for \$1 which buyers recognise as unauthorised copies (Quach & Thaichon, 2018; Zhang & Zhang, 2015; Singh et al., 2021). Counterfeiting is widely recognised as a disruption to market operations, posing a substantial threat to luxury brands by undermining reputational value, reducing demand for authentic products and increasing anti-infringement costs, ultimately lowering overall business revenue (Elsantil & Hamza, 2021). These negative consequences have been furthered by the growth of the internet, which has made counterfeit goods more widespread and visible (Jażdżewska-Gutta et al., 2024).

The role of digitalisation in expanding counterfeit luxury goods as digital platforms that increasingly facilitate their production, distribution, and visibility is discussed next.

2.12 Digitalisation and the Expansion of Luxury Counterfeiting

The internet, particularly social platforms, for example, Instagram and TikTok, has made counterfeit luxury goods more accessible by introducing consumers to social influence and encouraging impulsive buying behaviour, especially among those with excessive online engagement (Islam et al., 2021). Moreover, the internet has simplified the sale of counterfeit goods by lowering costs and increasing information gaps between buyers and sellers, making it harder to take legal action against online fraudsters (Da Cunha Brandão & Gaddekar, 2019). E-commerce websites have also significantly contributed to the rise of counterfeit luxury goods as they have enabled counterfeiters to access the global market with ease (Gunawardhana et al., 2024). Features like anonymous sellers and misleading product listings that falsely advertise counterfeit items as genuine luxury brands help spread fake products widely, contributing to the rise of counterfeiting in the luxury sector (Gunawardhana et al., 2024; Ravikumar et al., 2024). Digital technology has also made counterfeiting luxury goods easier with the innovation of 3D printing and advanced product designs, enabling counterfeiters to replicate the original product and copy the brand elements, thereby making it difficult to distinguish between genuine and counterfeit goods (Adu-Amankwa & Daly, 2023). Automated marketing tools and social media allow counterfeit sellers to reach consumers more effectively, increasing the rate of selling more counterfeit products (Chaudhry, 2022). Social media and online platforms are the cause of counterfeit consumption, as influencers and content creators are the ones who often unknowingly promote counterfeit products by posting about the products in a way advertising them, which makes the fake product popular worldwide (Renganathan & Teh, 2023; Emini, 2021). Broader ethical, regulatory, and social consequences of counterfeiting, including the implications for labour practices in illicit production networks, will be discussed next.

2.13 Ethical, Regulatory, and Social Implications of Luxury Counterfeiting

In addition to economic and brand-related effects, luxury counterfeiting creates serious ethical and regulatory challenges, which further increase its impact on the luxury industry (Razmus et al., 2024; Amaral, 2020). Regulatory measures aimed at reducing counterfeiting often struggle to keep up with the global and digital nature of counterfeit production and

distribution (Kennedy et al., 2019). Differences in legal systems, weak cross-border cooperation and limited enforcement capacity allow counterfeit networks to operate easily, complicating regulatory enforcement (Casino et al., 2022). As a result, counterfeit luxury goods continue to circulate widely despite intellectual property protections undermining legal market structures and reducing brand control (Song et al., 2021).

Ethically counterfeiting raises concerns related to consumer responsibility and moral judgment, as some consumers perceive counterfeit purchases as harmless alternatives to high-priced luxury products, particularly when authentic products are perceived as inaccessible (Kim et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2019). This perception can influence changes in consumer behaviour, with individuals often overlooking the wider social consequences of purchasing counterfeit goods (Ali et al., 2022). Such behaviour lowers the respect for the originality, craftsmanship and brand heritage, which are fundamental elements of luxury branding (Song et al., 2021). Over time, these ethical gaps contribute to the weakening of authenticity and diminish the symbolic meaning associated with luxury goods (Khan et al., 2021).

Labour conditions within counterfeit production networks are another critical yet often overlooked concern, as exploitative and modern slavery-like labour practices persist in poorly regulated and illicit supply chains where counterfeit goods are produced (Pinnington & Meehan, 2023; Szablewska & Kubacki, 2023). Counterfeit goods are commonly produced in illegal environments, where workers may experience unsafe conditions, long working hours and low-paid wages (Davies & Ollus, 2019). Compared with authorised luxury producers that follow regulations supporting ethical sourcing and skilled craftsmanship, counterfeit producers often neglect workers' welfare (Varela et al., 2021). This difference shows that there is social harm linked to counterfeit manufacturing and strengthens the ethical divide between genuine and counterfeit luxury goods (Li et al., 2020). Despite these concerns, existing literature largely addresses counterfeiting from an economic or legal perspective, giving limited attention to ethical and labour dimensions in consumer behaviour research. This gap constrains a comprehensive understanding of counterfeiting and its broader implications for the luxury industry.

2.14 Conclusion

This literature review explores luxury, its meaning, and the value created through brand identity, image and equity, as well as the social, psychological and symbolic motivations

behind luxury consumption. Studies show the increasing incidence of counterfeit products and their negative impact on brand authenticity, perceived value and consumer trust. Counterfeiting weakens the exclusivity and prestige of luxury brands, influencing consumer behaviour, purchase behaviour and overall market structure. This study is underpinned by Keller's (1993) and examines how counterfeit luxury products effect consumer perceptions, brand loyalty, and engagement. There has been a lack of research on counterfeit products and their impact on brand equity and brand image (Tahir et al., 2024; Butt et al., 2023). The next chapter presents the methodology adopted for this study, detailing the research approach and analysis method used to examine the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the methodology and research methods used in this study. It describes how data were collected and analysed to illuminate the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands and outlines the steps followed throughout the research process. The chapter begins by explaining the research question, then the research focus. Research paradigms are introduced with particular attention given to the interpretive paradigm. The qualitative methodology is defined, and the relevance to the study is explained, followed by a discussion of the choice of data. The narrative literature review approach is then described and why it is justified as the selected approach is explained. This is followed by a description of a narrative review process, and then the data gathering is explained, including the use of Boolean operators to refine the search. The analytical approach is then presented, with a focus on thematic analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of the overall methodology adopted in this research.

3.2 Research Question

The main aim of this research is to investigate the negative impact of counterfeit products on luxury brands, focusing on how counterfeiting harms brand image and consumer trust. The research intends to highlight the consequences of counterfeiting, how to protect a luxury brand's reputation, and spread awareness while rebuilding consumer confidence.

The following research questions guided this study:

How can a narrative literature review illuminate the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands?

3.3 Research Focus

This research illuminates the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands through a narrative literature review. Many consumers unknowingly purchase counterfeit luxury items, believing they are authentic, due to the deceptive nature of counterfeit markets. This situation not only involves a violation of intellectual property laws but also creates significant challenges for luxury brands.

The study focuses on how counterfeit products effect luxury brands' image and how the consumption of counterfeit products influences consumer perceptions, as the presence of counterfeit products can damage brand reputation, weaken brand exclusivity and reduce consumer trust in original luxury items, thereby negatively affecting the perceived value of genuine luxury brands.

3.4 Research Paradigms

Understanding research methodology is a crucial part of any study. However, before selecting an appropriate methodology, it is first necessary to consider which research paradigm best suits the study's purpose. Research paradigms have to be understood by the researchers. Therefore, a proper understanding of research paradigms is essential to ensure that the chosen methodology appropriately supports the research objectives (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

A paradigm includes the following components: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. Each component is clarified, and the relationships between them are investigated. Since all assumptions are estimations, the philosophical underpinnings of each paradigm can never be empirically proven or disproven (Scotland, 2012). Davies and Fisher (2018) stated that a research paradigm can be viewed as a belief system or a diverse way of viewing the world. There are four key research paradigms: positivist, post-positivist, interpretive and critical. The positivist paradigm depends on the concept of probability, which measures the likelihood of something happening. It uses deductive reasoning, where hypotheses are already determined based on existing knowledge and are then tested. The post-positivist paradigm uses multiple approaches because it recognises that no single method can fully determine the truth, and combining methods helps to balance their strengths and weaknesses. The critical paradigm focuses on raising awareness and bringing change in society. It aims to help disadvantaged groups and examine inequality, injustice, often called emancipatory research, and each paradigm has its own focus (Davies & Fisher, 2018). These paradigms shape how researchers understand and approach their topic. Selecting the most suitable one is a crucial step as it can strongly influence how the research is carried out and what findings are reached (Li, 2021).

The purpose of the interpretive paradigm is to explore, describe, and grasp diverse experiences and multiple worldviews (Davies & Fisher, 2018). The interpretive paradigm views social phenomena as best understood through people's lived experiences. It sees

knowledge as something constructed through interaction between the person who has experienced a situation and the one trying to understand it. Rather than focusing on cause and effect explanations, interpretivists aim to explore the deeper meaning behind individuals' inner experiences (Jayawardena & Amaratunga, 2019).

For this study, relativism is used as the ontology because it accepts that reality can take many forms, depending on the person's perception and context. Constructivism is an epistemology because it helps the researcher explore how meaning is created through a person's interactions with their environment. The interpretive paradigm fits the selected ontology and epistemology, as it views reality as something shaped by individuals, through their interpretations, social norms, and the meaning they assign to their experiences and environment (Noddesco, 2019). Therefore, the interpretive paradigm was suitable for this research because it helped to explore and understand the hidden issues related to the impact of counterfeits on the image of luxury brands.

3.5 Essential Components of an Interpretive Paradigm

Ontology: The term 'ontology' refers to the nature of reality, where the question "What forms reality?" is asked. This is concerned with the nature of existence or reality. **Epistemology:** This involves the question, "What does it mean to know?" Here, the focus is on the nature of knowledge. **Axiology:** The term 'axiology' refers to the question, "What is considered to be valuable?" This is concerned with the nature of values. **Methodology:** The term 'methodology' refers to the question, "How do we find out?" (Davies & Fisher, 2018).

3.6 Qualitative Methodology vs Quantitative Methodology

Quantitative research primarily involves collecting data represented as numbers, often gathered through experiments. It focuses on variables that can be measured or counted and typically follows a positivist or post-positivist approach (Fisher & Bloomfield, 2019). This methodology uses statistical tools to measure variables and analyse numerical data (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). In quantitative research, data collection and analysis are usually distinct steps, conducted separately to maintain objectivity and precision (Busetto et al., 2020).

By contrast, qualitative research deals with textual or verbal data rather than numbers (Pilcher & Cortazzi, 2024). Beyond just the methods employed, qualitative research considers the

deeper philosophical and theoretical frameworks guiding the study (Fisher & Bloomfield, 2019). It aims to explore and understand social phenomena, producing rich written data instead of numerical results (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Qualitative methods are often used to identify key factors and develop a theoretical framework for further analysis (Wild, 2015). This approach is well-suited for answering questions of “what”, “how”, or “why”, rather than quantifying “how many” or “how much” (Zhang, 2020). Additionally, qualitative research tends to collect and analyse data simultaneously, enabling a flexible and responsive process that adapts as new insights emerge (Busetto et al., 2020). Therefore, a qualitative methodology was adopted for this research as it aligns with the study’s aim to explore social phenomena through understanding, rather than relying on numerical measurement.

3.7 Choice of Data

This research relies on secondary data information originally collected and analysed by other researchers, which has already undergone statistical or analytical processing (Mazhar et al., 2021). Primary data refer to original information gathered first-hand to capture events or phenomena as they occur. By contrast, secondary sources interpret or document these primary data, such as written reports, articles, and analyses (Cerar et al., 2021). Secondary analysis involves the use of previously collected qualitative data, such as interviews, answers to open-ended questionnaire responses, field observations, and research diaries (Heaton, 2008). Primary data involve collecting new information to find a value, while secondary research uses data already gathered for a different purpose (Mulhern et al., 2019).

The quality of secondary data depends on the source and how the information is presented. Journal articles and reputable magazines often provide useful and reliable content, making them valuable secondary data sources for the research (Weston et al., 2019). Collecting primary data can be time-consuming and sometimes challenging due to limited access to research subjects. By contrast, secondary data can be obtained from various sources, including magazines, news reports, documentaries, advertisements, and the internet (Weston et al., 2019).

Due to the sensitive and ethically complex nature of topics such as counterfeiting, as discussed by Bian et al. (2016), along with related issues like black-market activity and customer trust, secondary data were chosen over primary methods because primary methods

can be difficult to implement in these situations, and also because of the time constraints of the study. Therefore, secondary sources, such as journal articles, books, and dissertations, have been used to explore and understand the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands.

3.7.1 Inductive Approach

This study used an inductive approach, as is commonly applied when a researcher conducts qualitative research. According to Thomas (2006), the inductive approach generally refers to reading raw data in detail to capture concepts and themes. It involves going through the information line by line carefully and applying codes to paragraphs or segments of text as concepts unfold (Bradley et al., 2007; Curry et al., 2009), which is relevant to the research questions. It is an ongoing process that can involve going back and forth between data analysis and literature to make meaning out of emerging concepts (Neeley & Dumas, 2016), and it may be used to identify theoretically interesting factors in a research context (Schüssler et al., 2014). The inductive approach, may be influenced by the researcher's evaluation objectives or questions, but ultimately it is derived directly from the analysis of raw data, not from prior expectations or models (Thomas, 2006; Azungah, 2018).

3.8 Narrative vs Systematic Literature Review

A narrative literature review is an analysis of specific information on a specific topic, where the researcher focuses on evaluating the purpose of the research and selecting studies of appropriate quality in terms of methodology, results and interpretation (Theile & Beall, 2024). Narrative literature reviews are common in research-based fields and serves as a way to appraise and combine existing evidence. It is important to update information when relying on previously published studies or textbooks (Theile & Beall, 2024). According to Rother (2007), narrative literature reviews describe and discuss the state of a field of study without necessarily detailing the specific databases or methodological approaches used. Instead, they employ an in-depth analysis of published electronic papers, journal articles and books.

Typically, narrative literature reviews follow a preferred structure that includes Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion, often arranged chronologically to summarise research history, identify clear trends and incorporate theoretical frameworks that organise content based on relationships between variables (Ferrari, 2015). The main advantage of a narrative literature review is its flexibility in providing a broad overview of a research area and

synthesising diverse evidence, which helps in understanding trends and theoretical perspectives (Ferrari, 2015). However, narrative literature reviews may lack transparency in study selection, be subject to author bias, and often do not provide clear information on methodological details, which reduces reproducibility (Rother, 2007).

By contrast, a systematic literature review is a structured, transparent and thorough approach designed to identify, assess and combine the existing body of research produced by scholars and practitioners (Okoli & Schabram, 2015). The systematic review process typically starts with collecting contextual data about the study, such as publication years, journals, and authors, followed by differentiating quantitative meta-analyses and qualitative meta-syntheses. Content analysis is often used to extract meaningful insights, and finally, the findings are synthesised to create a conceptual framework grounded in the literature (Thomé et al., 2016). The steps for conducting a systematic review involve searching multiple databases, such as EBSCO and SCOPUS, screening and selecting relevant studies using precise inclusion and exclusion criteria, and organising the gathered data in spreadsheets. This process ensures critical findings are identified, duplicates are eliminated, and data are structured to support a comprehensive descriptive (Fuentes et al., 2023). The key advantages of systematic reviews are their transparency and repeatability, which minimise bias and produce a rigorous, comprehensive synthesis of evidence (Okoli & Schabram, 2015). However, they can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, limiting their practicality in time-sensitive research settings (Tsertsvadze et al., 2015). Additionally, systematic reviews may be overly restrictive due to strict selection criteria, potentially overlooking broader contextual information (Okoli & Schabram, 2015). The key differences between Narrative and Systematic reviews are explained in Table 1.

Table 1

Key Differences Between Narrative Literature Review and Systematic Literature Review

	Narrative literature review	Systematic literature review
Main features	The methods used in a narrative literature review may not be clearly described, even if the articles are discussed and appraised.	The research questions are clearly stated. The criteria for selecting articles from the literature are also very well explained.

		The process of data extraction and synthesis is done clearly and methodically. The research includes all the relevant studies, and quality standards are applied to review them.
Uses	The review of past studies and the usual debates among researchers help to show the gaps that still exist. These gaps point to the need for further research, and they help in deciding which new methods or approaches could be used in the future.	Literature gathered in accordance with identifying, assessing, and synthesising, is done based on the answers given on the specific query. This helps to explain why more research is needed. It also brings together what is already known about the topic and what knowledge comes from it. A full report is created with clear steps so that the reasons, assumptions, and methods can be reviewed and checked by others.
Limitations	The study usually does not explain its assumptions or how it was planned. It is also not clear if there are any biases in how the information was chosen or judged. Because of this, the results cannot easily be repeated.	The scope of the research is restricted by the defined query, search terms, and selection criteria. The biases are not always clearly identified. Sometimes, the reader needs to reformulate questions that were not answered in the main query.

Source (Ferrari, 2015)

3.8.1 Justification for Using a Narrative Literature Review

A narrative literature review was selected for this research due to time limitations. Since the study was to be completed within 5 months, a systematic review, which requires extensive and structured data collection, screening and analysis, was not feasible. The narrative approach allowed for a more flexible and thematic exploration of the existing literature,

making it more suitable for meeting the research aims within the available timeframe (Greenhalgh et al., 2018).

The narrative literature review process begins with selecting a broad topic from which the research questions are developed. Once the questions are clear, the researcher searches for existing studies, using relevant keywords, abstracts and concepts that support the research aim. Relevant studies are chosen based on the connection to the topic and research questions, while the works that are unrelated are excluded. The selected literature is then analysed to identify key ideas, patterns or themes which are used to build a thematic or conceptual framework. Finally, the review is structured in a clear academic format, which includes an introduction, methodology, discussion and conclusion (Juntunen & Lehenkari, 2021). This process is presented in Table 2, which outlines the steps followed in this study's narrative literature review.

Table 2

The Process of Narrative Literature Review

Steps	Explanation
Step 1 - Topic Exploration	The study followed a chronological structure, beginning with an in-depth exploration of the research topic to build foundational understanding.
Step 2 - Keyword Identification	The research question helped identify key themes and search terms, such as counterfeit, luxury, luxury brands, customer satisfaction, consumer behaviour, social/economic impact, and labour or working conditions in luxury sector.
Step 3 - Guided Search Process	These keywords were used to guide the search for relevant data and literature in a focused and structured manner.
Step 4 - Concept Clarification	Once the main concepts were identified, attention shifted to how counterfeiting affects luxury goods brand reputation, and consumer trust.
Step 5 - Literature Selection	Relevant journal articles, dissertations, and books were gathered and reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

Step 6 - Data Organisation	An Excel spread sheet was created to organise and manage the selected literature efficiently, helping to avoid duplication and maintain clarity throughout the review process.
Step 7 - Database Search	Sources were collected using both Google Scholar and academic databases, including EBSCO and SCOPUS.
Step 8 - Time Frame and Language Limitations	The review focused on literature published between 2004 and 2024, a period chosen to capture significant developments in luxury goods and evolving nature of consumer behaviour. All sources that were chosen had been written in English to make sure that there was no confusion or misinterpretation while analysing the content.

Source adopted: (adapted from Ferrari, 2015)

3.9 Data Collection

Collecting data is one of the crucial stages in any research study, as it impacts the validity and the reliability of the research findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This process of collecting data is essential for answering research questions and achieving the study objective (Igwenagu, 2016). In this study, data were gathered using databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and EBSCO, which provided access to peer-reviewed articles, books, and dissertations (Gusenbauer, 2022; Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). Data collection began with the planning and selection of key words, such as counterfeit, brands, luxury brands, economic and social impact, digitalisation use, and labour problems. These keywords helped in searching for information related to the concept, particularly the negative impacts of counterfeit branded products in the luxury market, as well as the increasing methods used to spread counterfeit products worldwide. To ensure there was no duplication of sources, Microsoft Excel (Godino, 2023) was used to organise and remove duplicate references and the Zotero tool was used to manage the literature systematically (Lorenzetti & Ghali, 2013). Microsoft Word was used to draft the review, and the collected data were reviewed repeatedly to maintain consistency and to ensure that only the required and relevant information was included in the study.

3.9.1 Justification for Databases and Tools Used

Google Scholar provides a wide range of options for searching articles, books, book chapters, theses, and dissertations. It is convenient as it often allows direct access to PDFs and covers a wide range of material relevant to the topic (Haddaway et al., 2015). Scopus was selected because it provides broad citation coverage compared with other major bibliographic databases, encompassing journals, conference papers, and book records across multiple fields. Its advanced search option allows searchers to explore literature by keywords, authors, and citations, making it easier from different perspectives (Gerasimov et al., 2024).

EBSCOhost was included because it enables a single search across multiple sources and provides easy access to full-text documents (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). Together, these platforms are reliable, efficient, and comprehensive, making them ideal for secondary research and for collecting diverse and credible sources (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020; Bramer et al., 2017). Microsoft Word was used because it allows researchers to revise and organise information, efficiently create tables for data presentations, and draft or maintain a structured bibliography, which is essential for proper documentation. Microsoft Excel was used to arrange and manage data, making it easier to track patterns, organise themes, and ensure accuracy (Ose, 2016). Zotero was used to maintain citations and references effectively, helping to maintain consistency, prevent duplication of sources, and keep a clear record of all articles reviewed (Lorenzetti & Ghali, 2013).

3.9.2 Theoretical Framework Justification

For this study, the underpinning theory of Keller (1993) was used, which focuses on branding and consumer perception. Two theories were considered: Keller and Aaker. However, Aaker's (1991) theory emphasises brand equity and its components, such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand associations, which are essential for maintaining strong brands. Keller's model, by contrast, focuses on consumer perception and how brand knowledge influences consumer attitude and behaviour. Understanding both theories was important, but Keller (1993) was particularly relevant for this research because it provides a framework with which to analyse how counterfeit products affect the luxury brands and influence consumer behaviour. Applying this theory helps explain the relationship between brand management, consumer perception, and the impact of counterfeiting on brand value.

3.9.3 Data Parameters

The data parameters for this study were established to ensure relevance and consistency. The narrative literature review included peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, books, theses, and dissertations published between 2004 and 2024. The selected sources focused on luxury, brand, counterfeit luxury goods, their economic and social impacts, consumer behaviour towards luxury brands, digitalisation in counterfeit distribution, and how counterfeiting affected luxury brands. The theoretical foundations provided by Keller (1993) were applied to guide the selection and analysis of sources. Only English-language publications were considered to ensure accessibility and consistency. These parameters ensured that the study was based on reliable and relevant information aligned with the research objective.

3.9.4 Justification for Timeframe

The timeframe of 2004 to 2024 was selected to include recent and relevant studies in the luxury industry, as well as important research that has shaped knowledge over the past 20 years. This period helps identify trends, changes in consumer behaviour, the impact of digitalisation, and challenges such as counterfeiting. Limiting the reviews to these years also kept the study focused and manageable, avoiding outdated information that may no longer reflect current practices (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024; Song et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020).

3.9.5 Criteria - Inclusion and Exclusion

The inclusion criteria were developed to ensure the relevance and reliability of the selected literature (Sanfilippo et al., 2020). This study included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, theses, and dissertations related to luxury brands, brand equity, consumer behaviour, and counterfeit products (Frampton et al., 2017). The selected studies focused on the economic and social impact of counterfeit luxury goods, consumer behaviour towards the luxury brands, and digitalisation in counterfeit distribution (OECD/EUIPO, 2019; Radon, 2012; Bian & Moutinho, 2011). The publications written in English and published between 2004 and 2024 were considered.

The sources were excluded if they were not related to luxury, brands, luxury brands' counterfeit products or consumer behaviour, digitalisation, distribution or labour issues or if they did not provide relevant evidence to support the review, which could not support the statement (Shaheen et al., 2023). Material such as news, non-peer-reviewed articles, although

high-quality non-peer-reviewed articles were considered, a website like Wikipedia or opinions giving information was excluded to maintain academic quality (Page et al., 2021). Studies that were outside the selected time frame, were written in a language other than English or lacked relevance to the research objective, were also excluded (Helbach et al., 2022).

3.10 Using Boolean Operators for Effective Literature Search

Bramer et al. (2018) emphasised that using Boolean operators is an effective strategy to enhance search efficiency by systematically combining keywords. The operator “AND” helps narrow search results by retrieving records that include all specified terms, for example (luxury brands AND counterfeit market), while “OR” is used to broaden the search by including synonyms or related terms, for example (consumer trust OR luxury fraud). This structured approach allows a researcher to identify studies relevant to their research objectives and minimise irrelevant results. Keywords allow users to include multiple terms in a single search and combine ideas using Boolean operators. These operators found the foundation of database logic, showing how search terms relate to one another. To make a search broader or more specific, users apply Boolean operators such as “and”, “or”, and “not” (Jaffe & Cowell, 2014). Boolean operators like and, or, and nor are commonly straightforwardly used in different languages. However, not all combinations appear; for instance, “nor” is never used on its own, which helps make sense of these language patterns. Researchers suggest that Boolean operators work as a process that helps accept or reject information, depending on the context (Carcassi & Sbardolini, 2023). Boolean operators were used from the start to guide and focus the search. The following selections explain the steps involved in the literature screening, an outline of this can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Steps in the Literature Screening

Step One: Exclusion of Non-academic and Irrelevant Materials
Step Two: Ensuring Relevance
Step Three: Screening and Selection Process

Step Four: Analytical Approach to Literature Review
Step Five: Thematic Analysis

Source adapted from Snyder (2019)

3.10.1 Step One – Exclusion of Non-academic and Irrelevant Materials

Some sources were left out for specific reasons. For example, articles that were entirely focused on the positive side of the luxury without addressing any problems were excluded, since they did not relate to the main study question (Snyder, 2019). Blog posts, personal opinions and news articles were also left out because they usually do not go into enough depth and are not considered academic (Okoli & Schabram, 2015). Any studies that were outdated or not directly related to the subject area of luxury, brands, consumer behaviour, or counterfeiting were also excluded as they would not add value to this research (Grant & Booth, 2009).

3.10.2 Step Two – Ensuring Relevance

Setting these inclusion and exclusion criteria helped narrow down the search and keep everything on track. It also made sure that the final analysis was based on quality information that was directly connected to the topic (Wong et al., 2013).

3.10.3 Step Three – Screening and Selection Process

To ensure only the most relevant sources were included, a three-step screening process was followed: reviewing titles, then abstracts, and finally, full text. This process filtered out sources that were not relevant to the topics under scrutiny, like counterfeiting or consumer trust issues. Titles that appeared relevant moved on to abstract screening, whereas articles not focused on the negative aspects of luxury were excluded. Full texts were then reviewed to confirm valuable insights for analysis. This structured screening process followed best practices for narrative literature reviews, emphasising a clear and transparent selection method (Grant & Booth, 2009). Zotero was used to manage references, and Excel tracked the screening process, helping to avoid duplication and maintain focus on relevant sources (Ferrari, 2015).

3.10.4 Step Four – Analytical Approach to Literature Review

Once the relevant literature was collected and organised, each source was carefully read, often more than once, to identify key ideas of the effects of counterfeit products on the image of a luxury brand, for example, counterfeiting, consumer trust, brand reputation, and ethical issues. Notes were taken throughout the reading process, and important points or statements were grouped into relevant areas such as counterfeit, luxury, luxury customer satisfaction, and consumer behaviour in the luxury sector. This way of organising helped show which topic appeared most often across the sources and gave a clearer, fuller understanding of the topic. This method reflects how narrative literature reviews work by looking for important ideas and making sense of different studies (Ferrari, 2015). To stay organised and ensure clarity during this analytical phase, an Excel spreadsheet was used. This approach aligns with narrative review practices that value structure, transparency, and the synthesis of meaning (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). A total of 25 sources were collected.

3.10.5 Step Five – Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method used in qualitative research for finding and examining patterns, also called themes, in the data. It is a flexible technique that helps in analysing data without being linked to any specific theory. This makes it a method rather than a strict methodology (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Thematic analysis breaks a narrative into parts to identify its key ideas. These ideas help define the story's meaning and direction (Hargood et al., 2008). Commonly, thematic analysis is applied in empirical studies and is typically classified as a qualitative research method. However, important details about how the analysis turns the data into workable themes and leads to emerging conclusions are often not clearly explained. When employing a qualitative design, thematic data analysis is frequently the chosen strategy (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Data can be analysed using NVivo, or manually. Both were considered (see Table 4), but the manual approach was appropriate as this study had conducted a narrative literature review based on secondary research and had a relatively small sample of 25 sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis was done manually following the six-phase process established by Braun and Clarke (2006), see Table 5.

Table 4*NVivo vs Manually*

NVivo	Manually
NVivo is a software tool that is used in qualitative research (Edwards-Jones, 2014).	Manually is basically doing by hand without using any software (Parameswaran et al., 2020).
It is useful for arranging large and complex data sets (Maher et al., 2018).	It is useful for arranging small data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
A cost needs to be paid for NVivo software (Kraiwanit et al., 2023).	No cost has to be paid as it is done manually (Clarke et al., 2021).
Arranging and analysis can be done multiple times easily in NVivo (Limna, 2023).	A researcher can also make changes multiple times manually, but it takes more time and effort (Zamawe, 2015).
It is fast and time saving for large data (Limna, 2023).	It is slower and can take more time (Mattimoe et al., 2021).
NVivo helps in organising and managing data, but the researcher still does the analysis and interpretation (Zamawe, 2015).	In manual method the researcher reads and analyses directly which can give deeper understanding but may be harder to manage (Mattimoe et al., 2021).
NVivo helps in maintaining better consistency in coding (some codes used across data) (Bergin, 2011).	In manual method consistency can be difficult, especially with large data (Roberts et al., 2019).
NVivo requires training and practice to use it properly (Limna, 2023).	Manual method is easy to start and does not need technical skills (Isangula et al., 2024).

Table 5*Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).*

Phases	Description of the process
First step: Getting familiar with the data	The first thing is to get familiar with the data. If needed, the data can be transcribed, but the important part is to read to everything carefully and, if necessary, read it again. During this step, it helps to write down any early ideas or notes.

Second step: Generating the codes	This is where the interesting points in the data are picked out and coded. The process should be done in a systematic way across all the data, and the codes created must match the relevant parts of the data.
Third step: Looking for themes	The codes from the previous step are grouped into possible themes. At this stage, all the data related to each theme are collected together.
Fourth step: Reviewing the themes	The themes are checked to make sure they fit with the coded data and the data set overall. This helps to see if they make sense and allows a thematic map to be formed.
Fifth step: Defining and naming themes	The themes are looked at in more detail and the meaning of each theme is refined. Clear names are given that describe what each theme is about and how they connect to the overall findings.
Sixth step: Writing the final report.	This is the final stage, where the selected examples from the data are used to explain the themes. The analysis is connected back to the research question and literature and the full report is written.

3.10.6 Step Two – Generating the Codes (in Detail)

Analysis was carried out after each set of data was found and read. Table 6 shows how many codes were found. Data saturation was not fully achieved, as evidenced by the continued emergence of new codes in the final source = 26 new codes were identified in source 25. This indicates that saturation had not been reached (Hennink et al., 2017). Given the large number of sources reviewed, the analysis was concluded at this stage due to the considerable number of insights generated (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Saunders et al., 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Saturation was not reached, which is a limitation of the study. However, the findings emphasise the exploratory nature of the topic and the continuation of emerging codes, indicating a potential area for future research (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Table 6

Codes Found for Each Set of Data

	New codes	Total codes
Source 1	19	19

Source 2	15	34
Source 3	10	44
Source 4	17	61
Source 5	17	78
Source 6	15	93
Source 7	12	105
Source 8	10	115
Source 9	6	121
Source 10	11	132
Source 11	8	140
Source 12	10	150
Source 13	16	166
Source 14	14	180
Source 15	15	195
Source 16	14	209
Source 17	9	218
Source 18	7	225
Source 19	10	235
Source 20	10	245
Source 21	15	260
Source 22	20	280
Source 23	20	300
Source 24	24	324
Source 25	26	350
	Total	350

Step 3–5 – Looking, Reviewing, and Defining Themes

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co-created value consumer participation in brand customer relationship relationship marketing consumer loyalty brand loyalty perceived image luxury positioning brand associations brand equity brand value brand strength brand differentiation brand identity brand image brand perception brand positioning trust brand preference		
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Table 7 Continued

Codes	Sub-theme	Theme
personal identity self-identity identity enhancement self-expression intrinsic value	Intrinsic and personal motivation.	Consumer motivation and psychological drivers.

Table 7 Continued

Codes	Sub-theme	Theme
Consumer attitudes towards counterfeiting. reduced to buy fake negative attitudes towards counterfeit ethical concern perceived risk product performance risk social risk doubts about durability or performance positive attitude towards fakes acceptability of counterfeit purchase justification of counterfeit goods low ethical concern imitation acceptance tolerance of fake products acceptance of counterfeit goods counterfeit goods perceived legality moral beliefs about counterfeiting	Negative attitudes. Positive attitudes/ acceptance. Cognitive evaluations.	Consumer attitudes towards counterfeiting.

Table 7 Continued

Code	Sub-theme	Theme
purchase intention (luxury) engaging in luxury products liking for purchase of luxury product willingness to buy luxury items repeat purchase intention willingness to pay premium price high purchase premium payment willingness to purchase counterfeit planned counterfeit purchase likeness to buy fake goods intention to buy counterfeit luxury products ease of purchase availability positive word of mouth repurchase intention avoidance brand switching purchase hesitation switching to alternative luxury brand	Luxury purchase behaviour. Counterfeit purchase behaviour. Post-purchase/ behavioural reactions.	Behavioural outcomes (luxury and counterfeit purchase).

Table 7 Continued

Codes	Sub-theme	Theme
craftsmanship focus authentic quality durability performance reliability perceived quality craftsmanship premium price investing value symbolic value prestige symbolic meaning status signalling high-brand conspicuousness recognisable trademarks functional value symbolic value at lower cost interplay of functional social and individual values emotional satisfaction recognition recall knowledge of luxury brands visibility	Product-related value. Symbolic and social value. Functional emotional and combined value. Brand knowledge and awareness. Luxury positioning.	Luxury brand perception and value.

accessible luxury intermediate luxury inaccessible luxury affordable luxury risk of prestige reduction trust in brand expansion		
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Table 7 Continued

Code	Sub-theme	Theme
rapid growth of counterfeiting illegal trade economic sale profit generating demand for cheaper alternative market internet price incentives ease of imitation product imitation packaging replication unauthorised manufacturing revenue loss loss of exclusivity reduced perceived quality brand reputation harm negative brand image confusion	Market characteristics. Drivers of counterfeiting. Negative impacts on brands. Anti- counterfeiting strategies.	Counterfeit market and anti-counterfeiting strategies.

distrust awareness campaigns consumer education informing consumers about counterfeit risk trademark protection legal enforcement government regulation government enforcement capacity		
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Table7 Continued

Codes	Sub-Theme	Theme
social norm messaging subjective norms social pressure influence of social network reference groups social comparison social signalling managing other perceptions impression (social motive) desire to fit in success and prestige high-brand conspicuous quite luxury consumption low logo visibility avoidance of flashy brands	Social influence and norms. Self-presentation and signaling. Conspicuous and in conspicuous consumption. Identity and relational self.	Social influence and self-presentation in luxury consumption.

preference for inconspicuous goods relational identity social harmony identity expression personal values reflected social media word of mouth social media visibility brand name mention brand logo anxiety anticipatory embarrassment sensitivity to social comparison	Social media influence. Psychological/ social risks.	
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3.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology used to examine the effect of counterfeit products on the luxury brand image. An interpretive paradigm, supported by a qualitative approach, was adopted to explore consumer perceptions and behaviours. A narrative literature review using secondary data was selected due to its flexibility and suitability within time constraints. Data were collected from academic databases using defined keywords and Boolean operators, alongside clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality. Relevant peer-reviewed sources were selected through a careful screening process, while non-academic and irrelevant materials were excluded to maintain focus. The analysis was conducted manually, following consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of software-based methods. This manual approach involved reading, comparing, and connecting

ideas across studies, enabling a deeper understanding of the topic and forming a strong foundation for the research structure and producing seven themes. These themes will be presented in Chapter Four, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings of the research exploring how counterfeit products influence the image of luxury brands and affects consumer perceptions. Seven key themes were found after analysing the literature: Consumer brand relationship and brand management/marketing strategies, Consumer motivation and psychological drivers, Consumer attitudes towards counterfeiting, Behavioural Outcomes (luxury and counterfeit purchases), Luxury brand perception and value, Counterfeit market and anti-counterfeiting strategies, and Social influence and self-presentation in luxury consumption, see Table 8. A discussion of these findings can be found in the next chapter (Chapter Five Discussion).

Table 8

Thematic Table

Theme	Authors and Years	Title	Article/ Thesis/ Journal Name	Focus
Consumer motivation and psychological drivers	(Wilcox et al., 2009)	Why do consumers buy counterfeit luxury brands?	Journal of Marketing Research.	Consumer motivation and psychological drivers behind purchasing counterfeit luxury brands.
	(Khan & Fazili, 2019)	Does the need for social status among price conscious consumers induces consumption of counterfeit luxury brands?	Journal of Business and Management.	How status motivation encourages consumer to choose counterfeits as an affordable way to achieve prestige

				and social recognition.
	(Le Roux et al., 2019)	Do product category and consumers' motivations profiles matter regarding counterfeiting?	Journal of Product and Brand Management.	Focuses on how different consumer motivation profile and product categories influence consumer attitudes and decisions towards counterfeit product.
	(Iyer et al., 2022)	Drivers of attitudes towards luxury and counterfeit products: The moderating role of interpersonal influence.	International Marketing Review.	Studies the factor shaping consumer attitude towards luxury and counterfeit products, focusing on the role of interpersonal influence and social pressure.
	(Pappinen, 2024)	Consumer perceptions of luxury brands: A review of psychological motivators influencing purchase decisions.	Bachelor's thesis.	Psychological motivations influencing consumer perceptions and purchase decisions related to luxury brands.

Consumer attitudes towards counterfeiting	(Stravinskiene et al., 2013)	Factors influencing intent to buy counterfeits of luxury goods.	Economics and Management.	The study focuses mainly on price advantage, perceived risk, and social influence.
	(Iyer et al., 2022)	Drivers of attitudes towards luxury and counterfeit products: The moderating role of interpersonal influence.	International Marketing Review.	The study focuses on how interpersonal influence affect consumer attitudes towards both luxury and counterfeit products. It also examines the role of peer influence and social pressure in shaping consumer behaviour.
	(Phau et al., 2009)	Targeting buyers of counterfeits of luxury brands: A study on attitudes of Singaporean consumers.	Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing.	The study explores the attitude and motivations of consumers who purchase counterfeit luxury brands in Singapore. It also focuses on the demographic characteristics and

				consumer behaviour.
Behavioural Outcomes (luxury and counterfeit purchases)	(Stravinskiene et al., 2013)	Factors influencing intent to buy counterfeits of luxury goods.	Economics and Management.	The study examines factors that influence consumers intention to purchase counterfeit luxury products focusing on price advantage, social influence and perceived risk.
	(Khan & Fazili, 2019)	Does the need for social status among price conscious consumers induces consumption of counterfeit luxury brands?	Journal of business and management.	Whether the need for social status among price conscious consumers encourages them to purchase counterfeit luxury brands.
	(Hieke, 2010)	Effects of counterfeits on the image of luxury brands: An empirical study from the customer perspective.	Journal of Brand Management.	How the presence of counterfeit products affects the image and perception of genuine luxury brands from the consumer perspective.

	(Gani et al., 2019)	Factors affecting consumers' purchase intention for counterfeit luxury goods in Bangladesh.	Innovative Marketing.	Explores the factors that influence consumers intention to purchase counterfeit luxury goods in Bangladesh.
	(Phau et al., 2009)	Targeting buyers of counterfeits of luxury brands: A study on attitudes of Singaporean consumers.	Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing.	The attitudes and characteristics of consumers who purchase counterfeit luxury brands in Singapore.
	(Feng et al., 2023)	From devil to angel: How being envied for luxury brand social media word of mouth discourages counterfeit purchases.	Journal of Business Research.	How social media word of mouth and feeling of being envied for owning genuine luxury brands influence consumers attitudes towards counterfeit products.
Luxury brand perception and value	(Hennigs et al., 2015)	The complexity of value in the luxury industry: From consumers' individual value perception to	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management.	The study focuses on how consumers perceive value in luxury brands and how different dimensions of

		luxury consumption.		value influence luxury consumption.
	(Hieke, 2010)	Effects of counterfeits on the image of luxury brands: An empirical study from the customer perspective.	Journal of Brand Management.	How counterfeit products influence the image and perception of genuine luxury brands among consumers.
	(Siu et al., 2016)	The role of brand equity and face saving in Chinese luxury consumption.	Journal of Consumer Marketing.	How brand equity and concept of face saving influence luxury consumption behaviour among Chinese consumer.
	(Shimul & Phau, 2022)	Luxury brand attachment: Predictors, moderators and consequences.	International Journal of Consumer Studies.	Factors that influence consumers influence attachment to luxury brands and the outcome of the attachment.
	(Shah-Bahai, 2019)	What is the effect of the existence of	Thesis.	How the existence of counterfeit

		a counterfeit on the genuine brand?		products affects consumers of genuine luxury brands.
	(Makkar, 2014)	Luxury for or oneself or luxury for others? exploring the underlying emotions behind inconspicuous luxury consumption.	Thesis.	Emotional motivation behind inconspicuous luxury consumption and why consumer purchase luxury products for personal satisfaction rather than social display.
	(Pappinen, 2024)	Consumer perceptions of luxury brands: A review of psychological motivators influencing purchase decisions.	Bachelors thesis.	Psychological factors that influence consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions related to luxury brands.
	(Kuusela, 2021)	Luxury brand equity building in the digital age.	Thesis.	How luxury brand build and maintain brand equity in digital environment.

Counterfeit market and anti-counterfeiting strategies	(Stumpf et al., 2011)	Fake: Can business stanch the flow of counterfeit products?	Journal of Business Strategy.	The growing problem of counterfeit product and discussed strategies business can use to reduce the spread of counterfeit goods in the market.
	(Hoecht & Trott, 2014)	How should firms deal with counterfeiting? A review of the success conditions of anti-counterfeiting strategies.	International Journal of Emerging Markets.	Different strategies used by firms to deal with counterfeit products and identifies the conditions that make these strategies successful.
	(Spink et al., 2013)	Defining the types of counterfeiters, counterfeiting, and offender organizations.	Crime Science.	Focuses on defining different types of counterfeiters and structure of organisations involved in counterfeit activities.
	(Gentry et al., 2006)	The effects of counterfeiting on consumer search.	Journal of Consumer Behaviour.	How the presence of counterfeit products affects

				consumer search behaviour and decision making when purchasing branded products.
Consumer brand relationship and brand management/ marketing strategies	(Godey et al., 2016)	Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior.	Journal of Business Research.	How luxury brands use social media marketing and how these efforts influence brand equity and consumer behaviour.
	(Tynan et al., 2010)	Co-creating value for luxury brands.	Journal of Business Research.	The study focuses on how luxury brand create value together with consumer through experiences, interactions and brand relationships.
	(Kuusela, 2021)	Luxury brand equity building in the digital age.	Thesis.	How luxury brands meet and maintain brand equity in the digital environment using modern marketing strategies.

	(Boisvert & Ashill, 2018)	The impact of branding strategies on horizontal and downward line extension of luxury brands: A cross-national study.	International Marketing Review.	How different branding strategies affect consumer perception when luxury brands extend their product lines to new categories or lower price segments.
	(Feng et al., 2023)	From devil to angel: How being envied for luxury brand social media word of mouth.	Journal of Business Research.	The study focuses on how social media word- of -mouth and feeling of being envied for owning luxury brands influence consumer behaviour.
Social influence and self-presentation	(Ryu et al., 2023)	Anti-counterfeiting advertisements for luxury brands in the post pandemic era: Roles of message type, visual presentation mode, and self-construal.	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services.	How different anti-counterfeiting advertisement messages and visual presentation styles influence consumer responses toward counterfeit luxury product.

	(Makkar, 2014)	Luxury for or oneself or luxury for others? exploring the underlying	Thesis.	Emotional motivations behind inconspicuous luxury consumption and whether consumers purchase luxury goods for personal satisfaction or social recognition .
	(Ho & Wong, 2023)	Disassociation from the common herd: Conceptualizing (in)conspicuous consumption as luxury consumer maturity.	Consumption Markets & Culture.	The study focuses on how consumer express their identity through conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption.
	(Feng et al., 2023)	From devil to angel: How being envied for luxury brand social media word of mouth.	Journal of Business Research.	How social media word of-mouth and feelings of envy influence consumer behaviour towards luxury and counterfeit products.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the seven themes that were found. The discussion begins with consumers' brand relationships and brand management/market strategies, one of the strongest themes highlighting how brands respond strategically to consumers' motivation and behaviours by strengthening engagement and reinforcing authenticity. This is followed by consumer motivation and psychological drivers, as this forms the foundation of consumers' decision making, explaining why consumers are attracted to luxury and counterfeit goods and then by luxury brand perception and value, which provide a broader understanding of how consumers interpret and assign meaning to luxury brands, influencing both attitudes and behaviour. Next, the social presentation is discussed as social context plays a critical role in shaping motivation, attitudes and consumer consumption. The discussion then moves to exploring behavioural outcomes as motivations and attitudes ultimately lead to purchasing decisions. Next, the counterfeit market and anti-counterfeiting strategies are explored to situate consumer behaviour within a wider market context. Finally, consumers' attitudes towards counterfeiting represent how these key motivations shape evaluative perceptions of counterfeit products.

5.2 Consumer Brand Relationship and Brand Management Marketing Strategies

This was the strongest theme as reflected in the high number of codes - 42, and also explains how brand engagement influences consumer behaviour towards authentic and counterfeit luxury products. The theme indicates that consumer brand relationships and strategic management play a significant role in influencing consumer behaviour towards both luxury and counterfeit products. Studies suggest that a strong brand relationship can reduce consumers' willingness to purchase counterfeit goods by reinforcing the emotional and symbolic value associated with authentic luxury brands (Tynan et al., 2010; Boisvert & Ashill, 2018). In this context, Godey et al. (2016) emphasise that social media marketing activities, including entertainment, interaction and customisation, positively influence consumer engagement and contribute to the development of brand equity. This increased engagement which strengthens consumer attachment and contributes to the brand, making them more likely to value authenticity over imitation (Tynan et al., 2010). This also suggests that consumer engagement plays a key role in strengthening brand relationships. Aaker

(1991) highlights that brand loyalty is a central component of brand equity, which can reduce consumers' willingness to choose counterfeit alternatives. Keller (1993) further notes that consistent brand interactions help reinforce brand meaning in consumers' minds, strengthening their connection to the authentic brand. Similarly, Tynan (2010) argues that luxury brands create value through the co-creation process, where consumers actively participate in forming their experiences with the brand. This involvement enhances emotional connection and promotes a sense of belonging, which can discourage consumers from purchasing counterfeit products that lack such experiential and relational value. These findings suggest that luxury consumption is not solely motivated by product ownership but also by the experience and meaning attached to the brand. Building on these experiential and relational dynamics, the role of the digital environment has become significant in sustaining brand engagement and consumer trust.

In the digital context, Kuusela (2021) highlights the growing importance of online presence and digital communication in maintaining brand equity. Digital platforms enable brands to communicate their identity, heritage and authenticity more effectively, strengthening consumer trust and reinforcing brand differentiation (Godey et al. 2016). This is particularly important in a market where counterfeit goods are increasingly accessible through online channels, as strong digital branding can help consumers distinguish between authentic and counterfeit products. Branding strategies also influence how consumers perceive value, particularly when luxury brands expand into new categories or lower-priced segments (Boisvert & Ashill, 2018; Godey et al., 2016). Boisvert and Ashill (2018) demonstrate that such strategies can affect consumers' evaluation of brand authenticity and prestige. If not carefully managed, brand extensions may erode the perceived exclusivity of luxury brands, potentially making counterfeits more appealing. Therefore, maintaining a consistent and premium brand image is essential for preserving consumer trust and reducing the attractiveness of counterfeit goods. Furthermore, social influence and digital communication play a crucial role in forming consumer behaviour. Feng et al. (2023) show that positive social media word of mouth and the experience of being envied for owning genuine luxury products can discourage counterfeit consumption. This suggests that authentic luxury ownership continues to hold strong social value, and when effectively communicated, it can enhance consumer preference over counterfeits.

Therefore, this theme highlights that brand management strategies extend beyond traditional marketing approaches and requires a focus on building relationships with consumers. Luxury brands can strengthen their position in the market and reduce the impact of counterfeit consumption by enhancing emotional engagement, strengthening the brand authenticity, and utilising digital platforms.

5.3 Consumer Motivation and Psychological Drivers

This was second highest theme with 34 codes it emphasises psychological and social factors that shape consumers' attitudes and decisions in the luxury and counterfeit market: consumer motivation and psychological drivers; these play a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviour towards both luxury and counterfeit goods. Across the studies, motivation is consistently linked to the desire for social status, identity expression and perceived economic value (Iyer et al., 2022; Wilcox et al., 2009). These motivations explain why consumers may be attracted to counterfeit luxury goods despite being aware of their lack of authenticity. In several studies, consumers purchase counterfeit luxury goods as a way of achieving social recognition and status signalling was highlighted (Iyer et al., 2022; Khan & Fazili, 2019; Le Roux et al., 2019). Wilcox et al. (2009) suggest that consumers are motivated to buy counterfeit luxury brands because these products allow them to communicate a desirable social identity without paying the high price associated with the authentic luxury products. In a similar way, Khan and Fazili (2019) emphasise that price-conscious consumers who still aspire to social prestige may view counterfeit luxury products as an accessible alternative to genuine brands. These studies indicate that counterfeit consumption is often driven by the tension between status, aspiration, and financial limitation. Consumers may therefore prioritise the symbolic benefits of luxury branding rather than the authenticity of the product itself.

This suggests that the value of luxury brands lies in their symbolic meaning rather than their functional attributes. Keller (1993) explains that consumers form brand associations in their memories, linking them to prestige, identity, and status, which influence their motivation to access these meanings, even through counterfeit products. There are other studies that further support the idea that both economic and social motivations contribute to counterfeit consumption. For example Le Roux et al. (2019) show that consumer motivations vary depending on individual preferences and product categories, which indicates that counterfeit

consumption cannot be explained by a single factor but rather by a combination of economic and psychological drivers. Their study identifies several motivational profiles, including consumers who prioritise affordability and others who are motivated primarily by social recognition. Another study indicates that counterfeit consumption is influenced by a combination of economic and psychological considerations rather than purely financial reasons (Iyer et al., 2022). In addition to individual motivations, external and social factors also play a significant role in influencing consumers' motivations toward luxury and counterfeit consumption.

Social influence also emerges as an important psychological driver. Iyer et al. (2022) demonstrate that interpersonal influence significantly shapes consumer attitudes towards luxury and counterfeit products. Their study emphasises that peer pressure and social expectations can encourage individuals to display luxury-related symbols, even if doing so requires purchasing counterfeit goods. In this situation, counterfeit products function as tools that enable individuals to participate in social status signalling within their social environment. Psychological factors related to identity and self-perception also influence consumer motivation. Pappinen (2024) emphasises that consumers often associate a luxury brand with prestige, identity expression and personal value. These psychological drivers shape how consumers interpret luxury products and influence their purchasing decisions. When consumers perceive luxury goods as symbols of personal success or social identity, they may seek alternative ways to access these symbols if authentic products are financially inaccessible.

Overall, this theme indicates that consumer motivation in the context of luxury and counterfeit consumption is multidimensional. Economic considerations, such as price advantage, interact with psychological motivations like status seeking and identity expression. This indicates that counterfeit consumption is influenced by a combination of economic and psychological considerations because consumers seek to balance financial constraint with their desire for social recognition and identity expression. This may explain why counterfeit luxury products remain attractive to certain consumer groups despite concerns about authenticity and quality. Building on these insights, it is important to examine how these motivations shape broader consumer attitudes towards counterfeiting.

5.4 Luxury Brand Perception and Value

This was the third highest theme with 30 codes. Luxury brand perception and value represent another key theme emerging from the analysis. The literature analysed, consistently emphasised that luxury brands derive their value not only from product quality but also from symbolic meanings such as prestige, exclusivity and social identity. Hennigs et al. (2015) showed that luxury value is multidimensional and includes social value, functional value, individual value, and financial value. These different dimensions influence how consumers perceive luxury brands and determine the value they attach to them.

This suggests that luxury brand value is formed by both perceived quality and symbolic meaning. Aaker (1991) explains that brand equity is built through perceived quality and strong brand associations, while Keller (1993) argues that these associations must be strong, favourable and unique in consumer memory to create value. Consumers who perceive strong social and emotional value in luxury brands are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards these brands and engage in luxury consumption. However, the presence of counterfeit products can erode these perceptions of value. Hieke (2010) suggests that counterfeit goods may weaken the exclusivity associated with luxury brands by making luxury symbols more accessible to a wider audience. Similarly, Shah-Bahai (2019) argues that counterfeit products can damage brand image by reducing the perceived prestige of genuine luxury goods. This indicates that counterfeit products can weaken brand value by diluting these associations. Aaker (1991) suggests that this reduces brand equity, while Keller (1993) shows that the loss of unique brand associations in the consumer's memory damages overall brand perception.

Social identity also plays an important role in shaping luxury brand perception. Siu et al. (2016) emphasise that luxury consumption is often motivated by the desire to maintain social status and reputation. In certain cultural contexts, luxury functions as a visible symbol of social identity, allowing consumers to communicate their status within their social environment. Emotional attachment to a luxury brand is another factor that influences consumer perceptions. Shimul and Phau (2022) show that strong emotional attachment can strengthen consumer loyalty and encourage positive brand attitudes. Consumers who develop emotional connections with luxury brands are more likely to value authenticity and may be less likely to purchase a counterfeit alternative. In addition, digital communication and marketing strategies have become increasingly important in guiding luxury brand perception.

Kuusela (2021) highlights the role of digital marketing and brand communication in maintaining the digital environment. These strategies help luxury brands reinforce their identity and differentiate themselves from counterfeit products. The findings indicate that luxury brand value is closely linked to the strength of brand association formed in consumers' minds. When these associations emphasise exclusivity, authenticity and prestige, they enhance positive consumer perception and strengthen the overall value of the brand. This supports Keller's (1993) notion that strong, unique brand associations are crucial to building brand equity. However, the presence of counterfeit products weakens these associations by reducing exclusivity and creating uncertainty towards authenticity (Hennigs et al., 2015; Hieke, 2010). This suggests that brand equity and consumer perception are highly interconnected, as any interference with brand meaning can negatively affect how consumers evaluate and engage with luxury brands (Shah-Bahai, 2019).

Overall, this theme suggests that maintaining strong brand perception and value is essential for luxury brands in the market where counterfeit goods are widely available. Symbolic value, emotional attachment and effective brand communication all contribute to strengthening luxury brand equity.

5.5 Social Influence and Self-presentation in Luxury Consumption

This was the fourth highest theme with 28 codes. This theme relates to social influence and self-presentation in luxury consumption. Studies suggest that consumers often use luxury products as tools for communicating identity, status, and social belonging, indicating that luxury brands function as symbolic resources for self-presentation (Feng et al., 2023; Ho & Wong, 2023). Keller (1993) argues that brands carry meaning that consumers use to interpret and communicate their identity, while Aaker (1991) notes that these symbolic meanings enhance the perceived value and distinctiveness of the brand. Ho and Wong (2023) state that luxury consumption can take both conspicuous and inconspicuous forms. Conspicuous consumption involves openly displaying luxury products to signal wealth and status. Inconspicuous consumption involves a more nuanced form of luxury consumption that focuses on personal identity rather than public display.

Similarly, Makkar (2014) suggests that some consumers purchase luxury products primarily for personal satisfaction rather than social recognition. These consumers may prefer understated luxury items that reflect personal taste and identity rather than explicit status

symbols. In this context, social media plays a role in self-presentation in consumption by enabling individuals to construct and communicate their identities through the products they choose to display and share (Ho & Wong, 2023). Feng et al. (2023) demonstrate that consumers who receive admiration or envy from others for owning genuine luxury products are less likely to purchase counterfeit goods. Social recognition, therefore, strengthens the desirability of authentic luxury products. Marketing communication can also influence consumer attitudes towards counterfeit goods. Ryu et al. (2023) show that anti-counterfeiting advertisements can reduce consumers' intention to purchase counterfeit products when they emphasise social and psychological consequences.

Overall, this theme emphasises that social influence and self-presentation play a critical role in shaping luxury consumption behaviour. Consumers often use luxury brands as symbols of identity and status, and these social motivations influence their attitudes toward both authentic and counterfeit products.

5.6 Counterfeit Market and Anti-Counterfeiting Strategies

This was the fifth highest theme with 27 codes. The analysis also identifies the counterfeit market and anti-counterfeit as a key theme. Counterfeiting represents a significant challenge for luxury brands because it weakens the brand value, disrupts the legitimate markets and creates confusion among consumers. This shows the importance of clear and consistent brand knowledge in the marketplace. Keller (1993) suggests that consumers rely on existing brand knowledge to recognise and differentiate brands, and when counterfeit goods create confusion, this process becomes disrupted. Aaker (1991) further emphasises that maintaining a strong and consistent brand identity is essential for protecting brand equity in such conditions.

Spink et al. (2013) emphasise the complexity of counterfeit operations, noting that counterfeit activities range from small individual sellers to large organised criminal networks. This diversity makes it difficult for authorities and brands to fully control counterfeit production and distribution. The global nature of the counterfeit market also complicates enforcement efforts. The presence of counterfeit products can also influence consumer search behaviour. Gentry et al. (2006) suggest that counterfeit goods create uncertainty for consumers when they attempt to identify authentic products. This confusion may lead consumers to spend more time searching for reliable information, or it may discourage them from purchasing

luxury goods altogether. To address these challenges, companies have implemented various anti-counterfeiting strategies. Stumpf et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of strong brand protection strategies, including supply chain monitoring, legal enforcement, and consumer awareness initiatives. These strategies aim to reduce the availability of counterfeit goods and protect the integrity of luxury brands. Similarly, Hoecht and Trott (2014) argue that successful anti-counterfeiting strategies require a combination of legal, technological and organisational measures. Legal action helps enforce intellectual property rights, while technological solutions, such as authentication systems and tracking technologies, can help verify product authenticity.

This theme suggests that combating counterfeiting requires a coordinated effort involving the business, governments, and consumers. Without effective anti-counterfeiting measures, the continued growth of counterfeit markets may weaken brand value and consumer trust in luxury products.

5.7 Behavioural Outcomes: Luxury and Counterfeit

This was the sixth highest theme with 20 codes. The interaction between consumer motivation and attitudes ultimately leads to specific behavioural outcomes in the luxury and counterfeit markets. The theme suggests that purchasing behaviour is influenced by a combination of economic factors, social influence and perception of brand value. Several studies emphasise the importance of price advantage and social motivation in shaping counterfeit purchasing behaviour (Gian et al., 2019; Khan & Fazil, 2019; Phau et al., 2009). Stravinskiene et al. (2013) show that consumers are more likely to purchase counterfeit luxury goods when they perceive a strong price advantage and when such behaviour is socially accepted within their environment. Similarly, Khan and Fazil (2019) highlight that consumers who seek social status and are financially constrained are more likely to purchase counterfeit luxury products as substitutes for genuine brands. These studies show the role of perceived value and affordability in influencing consumer behaviour. Gani et al. (2019) suggest that consumers' purchase intention toward counterfeit luxury goods is strongly influenced by perceived value, price advantage and social influence. When counterfeit goods are perceived to provide a similar aesthetic or symbolic benefit to authentic luxury products, consumers may view them as an acceptable alternative.

However, counterfeit products can also negatively influence consumer perceptions of authentic luxury brands. Hieke (2010) argues that the widespread availability of counterfeit goods may weaken the perceived exclusivity of luxury brands. When counterfeit products become widely accessible, the symbolic differentiation between genuine and imitation products becomes less clear, which may reduce the prestige associated with an authentic luxury item. Social media and social recognition also play an important role in forming purchasing behaviour. Feng et al. (2023) demonstrate that consumers who receive admiration or social recognition for owning genuine luxury brands are less likely to purchase counterfeit goods. This study suggests that social approval associated with authentic luxury ownership can reinforce the desirability of genuine products and discourage counterfeit consumption. Overall, this theme indicates that consumer behaviour in the luxury and counterfeit markets is shaped by a complex interaction of motivations, attitudes and social influence. While economic considerations may encourage counterfeit consumption, social recognition and brand prestige can reinforce the value of authentic luxury products.

5.8 Consumer Attitude Towards Counterfeiting

This was the seventh highest theme with 18 codes. Consumer attitudes toward counterfeit luxury goods vary significantly depending on social, economic and ethical factors. While some consumers strongly oppose counterfeit products due to moral concerns or perceived quality risk, others adopt an acceptance or a more favourable attitude towards counterfeit consumption. One of the most significant factors shaping consumer attitudes toward counterfeit goods is price advantage. Stravinskiene et al. (2013) show that consumers are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards counterfeit luxury products when the price difference between an authentic and counterfeit item is substantial. In such situations, consumers may perceive counterfeit goods as a practical alternative because that allows them to access the symbolic value of luxury brands at a lower cost. Despite these perceived benefits, the same study also notes ethical concerns and perceived risk, such as poor quality or social judgment, which can reduce the intention to purchase counterfeit goods. This indicates that consumers evaluate counterfeit products based on perceived value rather than authenticity. Aaker (1991) suggests that brand association such as quality and value, shape consumer evaluations, may explain why a lower-priced alternative can still be viewed

positively. This also helps to explain why some consumers develop favourable attitudes towards counterfeit products despite ethical concerns.

A similar pattern is observed by Phau et al. (2009). Their findings suggest that consumers who cannot afford authentic luxury goods may develop more favourable attitudes toward counterfeit products because these items allow them to achieve social status and prestige at a lower price. Therefore, they suggest that counterfeit consumption is sometimes perceived as a rational decision rather than an unethical behaviour. Beyond economic influences and ethical influences, social influences also play an important role in forming attitudes towards counterfeit goods. Iyer et al. (2022) demonstrate that both normative and informational social influence affect consumer perceptions of luxury and counterfeit products. Normative social influence occurs when an individual conforms to the expectations of their social groups, while informational influence occurs when consumers rely on others for guidance in their purchasing decisions. In both cases, social interactions can influence whether consumers perceive counterfeit products as acceptable or undesirable.

Therefore, these studies suggest that consumer attitudes toward counterfeiting are shaped by a balance between perceived benefits and perceived risks. While the affordability and accessibility of counterfeit products can create favourable attitudes among consumers seeking status symbols, ethical considerations and concerns about authenticity may discourage counterfeit purchases. These differing attitudes show the complexity of consumer perceptions within the counterfeit luxury market.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the seven themes that were identified through the thematic analysis of the narrative literature review. The discussion demonstrated the complex nature of consumer behaviour and luxury brand dynamics in the context of counterfeit products, ranging from consumer brand relationships and brand management/marketing strategies, consumer motivation and psychological drivers, luxury brand perception and value, social influence and self-presentation in luxury consumption, counterfeit market and anti-counterfeiting strategies, behavioural outcomes, and consumer attitudes towards counterfeiting.

Using a narrative literature review helped to bring together and connect findings from different studies across marketing, psychology and consumer behaviour. This approach

allowed for the identification of key patterns and relationships across the literature rather than focusing on the individual findings. As a result, it provided an understanding of how consumer motivations, attitudes, and behaviours are linked and how they contribute to shaping perceptions of both luxury and counterfeit products. This discussion chapter reflects Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity model, which proposes that consumer brand knowledge, associations, and brand image are important in influencing attitudes and consumers' responses towards brands. Addressing the research question, this discussion shows that counterfeit products influence the image of a luxury brand by weakening perceptions of exclusivity, authenticity, and value through increased accessibility and market visibility. At the same time, it demonstrates that consumer motivation, social influence, and identity expression continue to influence both luxury and counterfeit consumption, indicating that luxury brand image is not only shaped by the brand management strategies but also by psychological, social, and market-level factors derived from the review of existing literature.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes this dissertation, *An Exploratory Study: Illuminating the Effects of Counterfeit Products on the Image of Luxury Brands*. It highlights the significance of the topic, the research question, the underpinning theory and summarises the findings. Finally, the chapter discusses the limitations of the study, identifies potential areas for future research and offers recommendations that could benefit luxury companies.

6.2 Significance of the Topic

The word luxury often conveys the idea that something is expensive, exclusive, and not meant for everyone. There are some people who think luxury items are affordable because they see them being sold at a low price, which is an erroneous concept. This misunderstanding mainly comes from the existence of counterfeit products that look exactly like the original luxury brand items, sold at a cheap price in the market, which affects the luxury industry. This study was conducted to illuminate the effects counterfeit products have on the image of luxury brands.

6.3 Choosing a Research Question and the Underpinning Theory

This study is underpinned by Keller's (1993) theory, which guided the analysis and interpretation of consumer perception and brand-related concepts. As Keller's framework focuses on brand knowledge and consumer perception, it provides a strong theoretical foundation for identifying key patterns in the data. Considering the research question, a narrative literature review was used to synthesise existing studies and develop a deeper understanding of how counterfeit products affect the image of luxury brands. By combining findings from previous studies, the review emphasises how counterfeiting can reduce brand equity, weaken perceived exclusivity, and influence consumers' perceptions of authenticity and value. Using Keller's theory with a narrative literature review helped to explain how luxury brand image is impacted by counterfeit consumption.

The main aim of this research was to understand the negative impact of counterfeit products on the luxury brand image.

To guide this research, the following question was used:

How can a narrative literature review illuminate the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands?

6.4 Synthesis of Findings

Through a narrative literature review approach, these findings were synthesised across multiple studies, allowing key themes such as consumer–brand relationship, authenticity, and digital influence to emerge. This approach helps illuminate how counterfeit products influence the image of luxury brands because it combines separate research findings into a clear understanding of consumer behaviour, brand perception and market dynamics. This study explored and analysed the effects of counterfeit products on the image of luxury brands. An important aspect to understand is that consumer brand engagement and brand management play a very significant role in shaping how consumers behave towards both luxury and counterfeit products. The findings show that when consumers feel emotionally connected to a brand and have a strong relationship with it, they are more likely to prefer authentic luxury products and less likely to purchase counterfeits. This is because luxury consumption is not only about the product itself but also about the meaning, status, and identity associated with the brand. Brand management strategies such as social media, digital marketing, and the creation of interactive experiences help build stronger relationships, increase brand loyalty, and enhance brand value.

At the same time, it is important for luxury brands to maintain their authenticity, exclusivity, and consistent image, because if these are weakened, then counterfeit products may become more attractive, which can erode consumer trust in the brand. The digital environment also plays a big role, as it helps brands connect with consumers while simultaneously making counterfeit products accessible. This emphasises the importance of strong online branding in maintaining consumer relationships. Social influence also affects consumer behaviour, as individuals are more likely to choose authentic luxury products when there is social recognition and perceived status. Overall, these findings suggest that luxury brands need to focus on building strong emotional connections using digital platforms effectively and maintaining a premium image in order to reduce counterfeit consumption.

6.5 Limitations

This study is based completely on secondary data from sources published between 2004 and 2024. Although a 20-year range provides a better view of the topic, it may still have missed

some important studies published before 2004 or the most recent developments after 2024. Additionally, the study is limited by the absence of primary data and repetition across sources. Full data saturation was not reached because new codes continued to appear in the later stages of analysis, which represents a limitation of the study; however, the findings emphasise the exploratory nature of the topic and the depth of the emerging codes, which indicates a potential area for future research.

6.6 Future Research

As this study was based on only secondary data, future research could collect primary data (without making anyone feel uncomfortable), for example, using anonymous surveys or online forms gathering honest opinions from consumers - about why they choose to buy counterfeit luxury products or how they feel about them. This study did not look at any specific regions, so future research could focus on different regions to determine if views on luxury and counterfeiting change depending on cultural or background. It would also be useful to look at the role of online platforms and social media, as they have made it easier to access both real and fake luxury items. Another possible area of future research is the working conditions and experiences of workers involved in making these counterfeit goods.

6.7 Recommendations for Luxury Companies

There are many people who buy products believing they are purchasing genuine luxury items at a lower price, which indicates a lack of awareness about counterfeit products in the market. To maintain and protect their brand reputation, luxury companies should take more protective steps to educate the public. They can communicate clearly that luxury products are not sold at cheap prices, and that many items in the market could be scams or imitations.

One way to do this is providing detailed information about their products, such as using consistent font, font sizes, and packaging features that help customers identify authentic items. Creating awareness campaigns, such as community events or digital advertisements, can also be useful. In the long term, luxury companies could introduce new ways to help customers check if the product is real. For example, QR codes or a secure digital system could store product details like where and how the item was made. When a customer scans the code, it confirms if the product matches the brand's official records. This method would help protect consumers from buying any fake goods. However, counterfeiters may try to copy

these methods, which shows that the luxury companies need to keep improving their security systems as well as innovating new ideas to deal with counterfeiting.

As a result, combating counterfeiting is a continuous battle that requires luxury brands to adapt constantly to counterfeiters' evolving tactics while maintaining customers' trust and protecting their brand reputation.

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