Counterfeit Products: The Role of Society in Educating Its Consumption

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ABSTRACT

The issue of counterfeit purchase has become critical, since most consumers feel that the purchase and consumption of such goods do not create any harmful effect on society, the economy, and the authentic fashion goods industry. Consumer demand has been a leading cause for the mushrooming counterfeit markets; thus, these dark markets pose the greatest challenge for luxury brand manufacturers in preventing consumers from participating in counterfeiting activities. This paper, which is based upon a hermeneutic phenomenology study, sought to uncover a rich and contextualised account of consumer consumption experiences on the purchase of counterfeit branded fashion goods through in-depth interviews. The phenomenology approach was used to probe into the living experience of consumers involved in counterfeit branded fashion goods consumption, and the consumers were selected via purposive and snowball sampling. The data was analysed using thematic analysis where six themes emerged; social norms, fear of being caught, showing off, keeping up with the trend, inadequacy and need to be different; which described society's acceptance in normalising this illegal and unethical consumption practice. The findings revealed that the normalisation of counterfeit consumption in society has become a common practice, and the description of the experience was personally gained by the consumers when dealing with and confronting other society members. This study contributes knowledge to the area of counterfeit branded fashion goods and consumer behaviour as the emerging themes described the actual experiences captured from the consumers who were continuously involved in counterfeit consumption practice. This research contributes to scholarly and managerial knowledge in the Malaysian context through more insights into comprehending the underlying causes of counterfeit consumption phenomena.

Keywords: Counterfeit branded fashion goods, Social norms,Cconsumers' rationalisation, Phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Consumer demand has been a leading cause for the mushrooming counterfeit markets (Bian et al., 2016; Eisend et al., 2017; Eisend & Schuchert-güler, 2006; Gistri et al., 2009). These dark markets pose the greatest challenge for luxury brand manufacturers in preventing consumers from participating in counterfeiting activities. The literature depicts the role of consumer demand, apart from the supply, ethical, and lawful issues, as well as the key to the survival of the counterfeit market (Bloch et al., 1993; Chaudhry & Cesareo, 2017; Large, 2014; Meraviglia, 2015; Staake et al., 2009). Counterfeit goods are usually associated with images of knock-off brands (Grossman & Shapiro, 1998; Staake et al., 2009; Zaichkowsky, 2000). The original goods are replicated, duplicated, and imitated to carry a similar brand image for a fraction of the cost of the authentic goods. To be

precise, the involvement of consumers in counterfeit consumption is classified into a deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeit purchase (Grossman & Shapiro, 1998). Deceptive counterfeit purchase occurs when consumers lack knowledge and information to distinguish the counterfeit from original goods (Gino et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2018)

On the contrary, non-deceptive counterfeit purchase reflects consumers equipped with sufficient knowledge and the ability to detect cues that indicate the counterfeit nature of the goods (Bian & Veloutsou, 2007; Sharma & Chan, 2011; Zampetakis, 2014).

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

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

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

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

BACKGROUND OF STUDY
Consumer's Rationalisation Strategy
Past studies revealed that consumers are willing to purchase counterfeit goods due to the belief that their actions will harm neither other society members nor manufacturers of genuine luxury goods (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015). Although consumers experience guilt as they are fully aware that such consumption practice is unethical and illegal (Bian et al., 2016; Eisend & Schuchert-güler, 2006; Farzana et al., 2017; Pueschel et al., 2016; Teo & Mohd Yusof, 2017), consumers try to convince themselves as wise in utilising the existence of counterfeit market with optimal resources. They justify that purchasing counterfeit goods as a good investment for something that degenerates quickly (Kim & Johnson, 2014b; Perez et al., 2010; Thaichon & Quach, 2016).

Often, consumers rationalise what they have purchased is worthy as long as the counterfeit version fulfills their hedonic and utility needs (Key et al., 2013; Kim & Johnson, 2014a; Pueschel et al., 2016; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). In light of counterfeit goods purchase, emotional experiences, such as pleasure and enjoyment, are the outcomes that motivate consumers to get involved in counterfeit consumption activity (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017; Moon et al., 2018; Zampetakis, 2014). Hence, higher consumer involvement in rational purchases leads to higher cognitive dissonance if the performance or satisfaction does not meet consumers' expectations, thus leading to the element of surprise. Similarly, in the context of counterfeit consumption, consumers were found to be aware of the inferior performance of counterfeit goods (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Zaichkowsky, 2000), thus did not expect excellent functional benefits from counterfeit goods. Here, the act of satisfying the available options by rationalising counterfeit goods as "good enough" enables consumers to see their decision is indeed rationale. As a result, this rationalisation strategy aids consumers to eliminate mental discomfort, hence enabling them to compromise with the performance of the counterfeit goods.

Bian et al. (2016) mentioned that consumers rationalise their involvement in counterfeit consumption by employing neutralisation techniques, namely the denial of responsibility. Here, the tendency to reduce dissonance feeling leads to the behaviour of accepting to breaking a moral code or against the social norms as they legitimise their action and behaviour (Oxoby, 2003). Surprisingly, Islamic consumers use religious and moral values to excuse themselves from waste consumption, sharing resources, and gaining benefits together (Pueschel et al., 2016). This justifies the assimilation-related evidence, as emphasised by Cooper (2007), which enables one to tolerate and compromise with dissonance action performed by others that contradicts with their consonant (Redondo & Charron, 2013).

Witnessing behaviour displayed by others that is inconsistent with one's actual consonant is bound to change his cognition and later be influenced to accept the inconsistency. For instance, individuals learn and observe the contradiction of cognition that enables them to adapt to the inconsistency, and further rationalise it as acceptable action and behaviour. Sharma & Chan (2016) found that Chinese consumers in China were no longer concerned with "face consumption" that previously exerted a negative influence on consumers' purchase intention on counterfeit goods (Chen et al., 2014; Pang, 2008). Subjective norms seemed to encourage the Chinese consumers' willingness to purchase counterfeits upon becoming an acceptable norm (Jiang & Shan, 2016), and to some extent, a common consumption practice within the community (Thaichon & Quach, 2016). Hence, consumers are free to showcase their counterfeit fashion goods in public without having the fear of exposing themselves to negative social repercussions. This explains the reasons for the high demand for counterfeit goods as consumers are able to change their existing negative beliefs due to assimilation of norms and justification of their consumption behaviour with temporary benefits.

Nonetheless, affluent consumers would try to decrease the importance of dissonance cognition by convincing that they are wise and smart in spending their money, instead of succumbing to luxury fashion goods that quickly fade and are not worth for long-term investment (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Pueschel et al., 2016). Hence, consumers are motivated to eliminate the feeling of guilt by denying it is not their responsibility to protect both society and the economy (Bian et al., 2016; Teah et al., 2015). Similarly, Large (2014) asserted that it is unfair to place the responsibility on consumers as the fashion goods industry itself practises replication and duplication of design.

By employing a rationalisation strategy, consumers justify that the profits and sales reaped by the luxury goods industry are not significantly affected by the counterfeiting activities (Cesareo & Stöttinger, 2015). Consumers pointed out that their involvement in counterfeit goods did not create any harm to others (Casola et al., 2009; Kim & Johnson, 2014a; Teo & Mohd Yusof, 2017), the "benefits are too good to resist" (Thaichon & Quach, 2016), as well as being part of perception towards inequality and injustice in society (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). These "excuses" are meant to revoke the inconsistencies between the existing beliefs and the actual behaviour, which can lead to mental discomfort.

This study is inspired by similar work in the area of consumers' motivation to purchase counterfeit luxury brands from the dimension of cognitive and affective elements, outlines the underlying meaning of consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption. Previous issues mainly highlighted how consumers dealt with ethical and cognitive moral emotions, which explained the neutralisation and coping strategies via the rationalisation process (Bian et al., 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016; Sharma & Chan, 2016). The literature revealed that consumers associated counterfeit goods with inferior images, therefore, exposed them to psychosocial risks and threatening their social status (Moon et al., 2018; Zaichkowsky, 2000). Contrary to this, another literature discovered that the

role of society in legitimising this unethical consumption motivates consumer involvement in counterfeit consumption (Ahuvia et al., 2013; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). Accordingly, there is a need to explore the role of society from consumers' live experiences to uncover the underlying meanings beyond the reasons and motives of consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption.

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

Sampling
The researchers adopted a purposive and snowballing sampling strategy, and in total, included ten in-depth interviews with five male and five female participants. The researchers classified them as young adult consumers ranging from 20 to 33 years old. There were pre-selected criteria for choosing and selecting the informants. The informants should at least have two years of experience purchasing and using counterfeit fashion goods, i.e., actively purchasing, owning, and using counterfeit goods for the past six months. This criterion is imperative in defining consumer involvement (Freedman, 1964) as it describes consumers' concern about, interest in or commitment to a particular position on counterfeit consumption.

The informants chosen in this research were consumers who purchased counterfeit branded fashion goods, such as handbags, sunglasses, apparel, watches, purses, scarves, *telekung* (female Muslim prayer attire), shoes, slippers, and sandals. The researchers identified that these fashion goods categories had been the most frequently counterfeited in the literature. As for female scarves (hijab) and *telekung*, the researchers recognised brands such as Naelofar, Bawal Exclusive, Duck scarves, and Siti Khadijah as among the famous Muslim brands which have been counterfeited and sold widely in Malaysia (Berita Harian, 2016; Harian Metro, 2018; Malaysia Gazette, 2019; New Straits Times, 2018). The researchers audiotaped each in-depth interview which lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. Demographic data are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic data of Informants

Informants	Occupation	Years of consumption experiences	The most frequent purchase of counterfeit fashion goods
Informant 1 22 years Male Selangor	Student at a higher learning institution	7 years	Shoes, jersey, and watch
Informant 2 28 years Female Kuala Lumpur	Information Technology Executive	8 years	Handbag, Telekung (female Muslims prayer attire mostly worn in Asian countries), hijab (female Muslim headscarf)
Informant 3 20 years Male Negeri Sembilan	Sales promoter	3 years	Apparel, bag, shoes
Informant 4 33 years Female Kuala Lumpur	Entrepreneur (founder of cosmetic product)	10 years	Handbag, purse, belt, sunglass
Informant 5 22 years Female Kuala Lumpur	Admin Assistant at a financial institution	4 years	Handbag, shoes
Informant 6 33 years Female Putrajaya	Government Officer	2 years	Handbag, hijab (female Muslim headscarf)
Informant 7 22 years Female Selangor	Student at a higher learning institution	2 years	Handbag, watch and hijab(female Muslim headscarf)
Informant 8 33 years Male Kuala Lumpur	Officer at a government agency	15 years	Wallet, watch, slippers, apparels
Informant 9 20 years Male Kuala Lumpur	Student at a higher learning institution	5 years	Shoes, watch, tracksuits
Informant 10 22 years Male Selangor	Student at a higher learning institution	5 years	Shoes and jersey

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

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

It helped the researchers gain more insights into understanding the underlying motives of continuous consumer involvement in this counterfeit consumption.

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

The essence was the final output derived from the interpretation of lived experience. Gist from descriptive stories reflects the experiences of the informants in a specific phenomenon that comprises of "what" they experienced and "how" they encountered it (Flood, 2010). The researchers acquired the 'familiarity' with the object or subject while discussing the phenomenon to identify the essential meaning to obtain the essence. For instance, our experience in buying or using counterfeit fashion goods allowed us to be familiar with the phenomenon of counterfeit consumption practice. It enabled us to discuss its fundamental meaning. Consumers' thoughts on the benefits gained, feelings, and the researchers captured emotions from their involvement in counterfeit consumption activity signified experiences in the consumption process. The researchers interpreted such experiences into stories and texts, which were then thoroughly examined to understand counterfeit consumption's meaning structure as part of the lifeworld that arrived at the essence.

Hence, essential meaning may be concluded as something that we are familiar with, such as life practices, wherein this familiarity has to be expressed through living, action, stories, and reflection (Creswell, 2013). The researchers used the interpretive process, and this required shifting from one part of an experience to the whole experience, as well as back and forth continuously to increase the depth of understanding the experience (Laverty, 2003). In this study, the researchers read through each of the interviewed transcripts, also known as naïve reading, by reading the text several times to grasp its sense as a whole. During naïve reading, the researchers switched from a natural attitude to a phenomenological attitude within the context of counterfeit consumption.

The researchers kept the transcriptions and other collected documents in a safe place to retain privacy and confidentiality. Initially, the researchers organised the data files prepared for the audiotaped interviews and completed the informants' detailed sheets before the interview session and field notes. The researchers named the files with a pseudonym for counterfeit branded fashion goods consumers to establish an effective organisation quickly. Then, the researchers listened to and transcribed verbatim each of the recorded interviews. Before the transcription process, the researchers reviewed the field notes of each informant to expand the initial impression of the interaction to know the central ideas, concepts, and issues raised by the informants. By using this approach, the researchers engaged in the process of self-reflection, whereby biases and assumptions of the researchers were not bracketed out (Laverty, 2003). Next, the researchers reviewed and transcribed the audiotape word-by-word in Malay as the interview sessions were conducted using the Malay language. The audiotape was transcribed right after each interview ended, thus enabling the researchers to work on a preliminary analysis to produce each transcription's main themes and subthemes.

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

Then, the researchers articulated meanings for each significant statement extracted by jotting down notes and ideas derived from the informants' exact words or own words or concepts from the literature on the left margin of each transcript. This process included questioning the data patterns and assigning the coded information to the RQs (Creswell, 2013), known as open coding. Next, the researchers transformed the identified initial themes into

concise phrases to capture the essential quality found in the text (Osborn & Smith, 2008). It is also known as structural analysis as it requires analysing themes that exist in the texts to convey essential meaning. This process involved axial coding (Miles et al., 2014), in which the researchers made grouping on the previous initial code (open coding process) that went beyond descriptive coding or "coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning" (Richards, 2015). The single codes were grouped into more significant categories and referred to as axial coding (Miles et al., 2014).

The researchers returned to the beginning of the transcript and reviewed the critical statement, which was coded using the exact words from the informants (subthemes) and reiterated across the informants' narratives to construct repeated meaningful themes. Then, the researchers looked for connections among the subthemes to cluster them in a more meaningful way. In this process, similar themes were cross-checked with each informant transcript to ensure that the emerging themes reflected the informant's actual words and meaning. During this process, the researchers clustered or merged some subthemes into a master list of concepts derived from both data sets that reflected the recurring patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This regular pattern turned into the main themes that illustrated abstraction derived from the data, representing the general inductive approach.

To allow for a holistic perspective, the three researchers discussed all emerging themes. The interchange and discussion of interpretations helped the researchers define and redefine the direction of analysis. The researchers examined the categorisation of data and comparisons between the informant's reports to identify the main themes and subthemes. Table 2 summarises the three phases of analysis conducted in the study.

Table 2: Summary of the three phases of analysis

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Description of the Data Analysis Process
Phase 1: Familiarising with Data	Prolonged engagement with data
	Document theoretical and reflective thoughts
	Document thoughts about potential codes/themes
Phase 2: Generating initial code (preliminary analysis on themes)	Preliminary analysis on codes and themes
	Peer review on the preliminary analysis (initial code and themes)
Phase 3: Reviewing preliminary analysis Themes development	Peer review
	Reviewing the preliminary analysis among the researchers
	Researchers consensus on defining and naming the themes
	Themes vetted by the committee
	Documentation of the finalised themes

Ethical Considerations

The researchers briefed all the informants about the purpose of the interview and their position in this investigation. As for 'consent and ethics approval', the researchers obtained a written consent form to proceed with the study from each participant voluntarily. The researchers informed them that their rights and interests were essential when reporting and distributing the data. The researchers kept the name and other personal details of the participants confidential. In an attempt to protect the identity of the participants, the researchers applied pseudonyms. The researchers securely stored all related records and data, and nobody other than the researchers could access them. They archived documents in a secure room, keeping them for three or seven years after completion.

FINDINGS

Six main themes emerged related to the consumer's involvement in counterfeit fashion goods; social norms, fear of being caught, showing off, keeping up with the trend, inadequacy and need to be different reflected the social acceptance that normalises this illegal and unethical consumption practice. The emerging themes are presented in Figure 1 below.
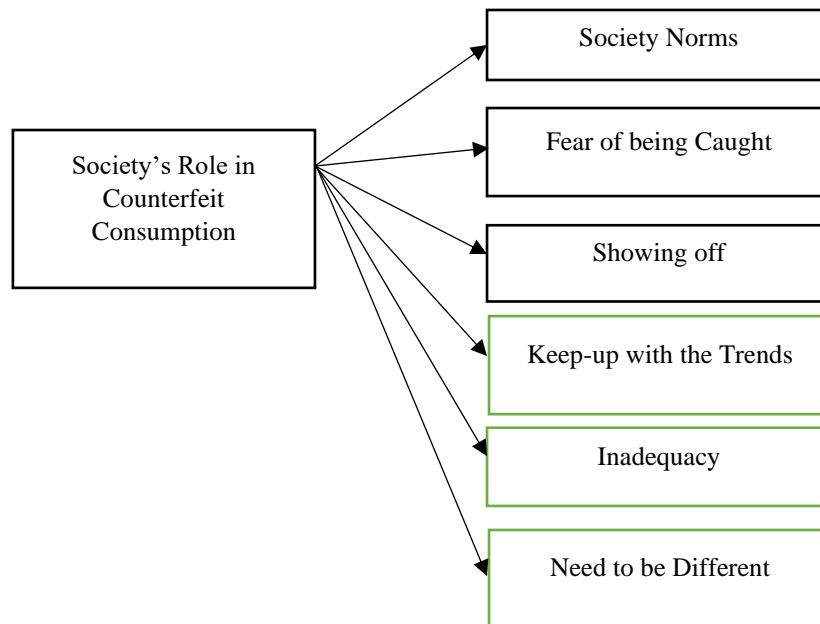
Figure 1: Emerging Themes of Society's Role in Counterfeit Consumption

Theme 1: Society Norms
This theme described how the informants viewed the involvement of other society members in this consumption behaviour and concluded that "everybody does it." By doing so, the informants justified that there was nothing wrong with their participation in counterfeit consumption.

> *"He asked, "Are you buying the original one?" Then, he touched my jersey and the material.
> I replied to him, "No, this one is the first copy one, just the ordinary one." ... He just said,
> "Oh, it's a first copy one? Never mind, as long as we could wear it..."* (Informant 1)

> *"Why should I stop buying the first copy goods? ... After all, who do we wish to impress if we are
> buying the original? Are we a celebrity? ... We will regret it because it is quite difficult too
> influence people like us. Hence, even for KPDNKK, the officers' wives are also selling those
> first-copy goods. So, how about that?"* (Informant 2)

> *"... because we are living with the Malay mentality, they still perceive that we are wearing
> a first copy version despite paying so much for the original one."* (Informant 3)

> *"... I think purchasing first copy goods has become a trend. People are not bothered and
> do not mind using first-copy goods. Sometimes, they do not realise the products that we wear.
> Usually, they are not even asking about it ..."* (Informant 4)

> *"... Usually, they did not ask about it and just asked where I bought it from. So, if I told them
> where I bought it, they would know the status of the goods. I do not mind if they asked about
> my first copy goods, as I would tell them. But they had never asked about the goods ..."* (Informant 5)

Theme 2: Fear of Being Caught
Instead of feeling confident and not worrying if others would misjudge or discriminate against them, some of the informants did have fear in them and felt insecure when wearing counterfeit fashion goods in front of others. A feeling of low confidence in carrying the counterfeit version and being worried about getting "caught" created a sense of fear among these informants.

> *"Sometimes, I would feel anxious too. This is especially when someone asked me, "Why is the size
> (Long Champ tote bag) different?" They would start to think if it is a first copy good or original? ...
> That was my feeling, quite scared. But I still use it."* (Informant 6)

> *"... I just tell them it's original. It's like I'm lying to them a little bit because if my mother knows
> about this, she would feel ashamed. I have a feeling that one day, they will know about it. I do feel*

afraid. Feel afraid if they found that I'm lying to them. But I still wear it (first copy sling bag)." (Informant 7)

The above excerpts revealed how the social group members exerted a great influence on one's purchasing and consumption activities. Indeed, the informants evaluated the psychosocial risks before deciding to wear the counterfeit branded fashion goods. Most of these informants shared positive acceptance from the society members, which normalised this consumption activity as an acceptable practice. The informants found that the society was supportive, which enabled them to keep up with others, fashion, and trends by meeting their material needs and wants.

Theme 3: Showing Off
The theme of showing off revealed the informants were attracted to purchase and wearing counterfeit "loud" brands, which emphasises the "logofication" lifestyle. They described their sense of pride and satisfaction in their ability to show off the most popular brands to the public.

> *"… simply put, we want to show off, "I have it, and you don't." So that's all. I am more for it.*
> *It feels like I got left behind. All my friends have it; I do not. It feels wrong. I feel like, "I'm outdated."*
> *It is a trend to show off everything we buy …"* (Informant 8)

> *"… Then, I captured the photo. Someone asked me, "Is it original?" "It looks like the original."*
> *So, it might look original, but for us, we know that it is not."* (Informant 5)

> *"… It is because, first, it is a trend. As for me, I will buy goods from the top-performing clubs.*
> *When I wear them, people will say that they look nice …"* (Informant 1)

Theme 4: Keep-up with the Trend
The theme of keep-up with the trend described most of the informants found that counterfeit consumption allowed them to keep up with fashion and trends in order to be accepted by other social group members.

> *"… Long-time ago, I could buy the original Boy London watch for RM70, but now the original*
> *costs RM500. I also follow the season and keep for trend."* (Informant 8)

> *"… Everybody wore Vans … It appeared lovely and many people used it. At that time, it was a trend,*
> *if I'm not mistaken … I saw them wearing it, and it was nice, charming …* (Informant 9)

> *"… When there is a new season, the design is no longer available. So, I have to purchase it. I feel*
> *being left behind if I do not buy it … Sometimes, there is a rare jersey, and nobody owns it. So, when*
> *I have it, I feel fabulous."* (Informant 10)

> *"… It was just a trend among the youngsters. It helps in saving money, and we can be fashionable.*
> *So far, it was just for the feeling of fulfillment."* (Informant 3)

All the themes portray how social influence played a significant role in creating this consumption practice as consumers believed that following the trends enabled them to be connected with others and complete their social life. When the informants discussed their feelings of getting attached to the brand and trend, particularly, it refers to the need to be affiliated with others who create the trend. By keeping up with others, consumers can establish a strong bond and eliminate the feeling of loneliness and alienation. This situation strengthens the fact of society's acceptance of this counterfeit consumption practice, which is a key reason behind the escalating demand for counterfeit fashion goods.

Theme 5: Inadequacy
The findings showed that most of the informants experienced deprivation and scarcity in owning the latest design and collection of branded fashion goods. Negative emotions, such as "the feeling of lack" and "having regrets", described how internal tense urged the informants to keep buying and wearing new collections of counterfeit branded fashion goods.

> *"… If I do not buy it, I feel as if I do not have enough clothes. I feel something is lacking.*
> *I will think, "Gosh, I always have the same cap, bag, and shoes" …"* (Informant 3)

> *"... Because the design keeps on updating ... during the World Cup, I bought many new jersey designs. I managed to collect the nice ones ..."* (Informant 10)

> *"... If I am not buying it, then when I come back to Malaysia, I feel regret. When coming back to Malaysia, the design is not available in Malaysia."* (Informant 2)

Theme 6: Need to be different

In this theme, the informants revealed that the existence of counterfeit branded fashion goods enabled them to be different from others and allowed them to be the first person and ahead of others.

> *"... It signified that I wanted to be different from the others. I refused to be identical to others. I did not want to follow others. I did not want to be the same as the others."* (Informant 2)

> *"... Whenever I wish to own authentic goods, but could not afford to buy the original or the items are not available, I will remake the products two or three times until I am satisfied with it."* (Informant 8)

> *"... The things that nobody wears yet here, I can wear them first. I could start the trend. Malaysia is left out, even for the original collection; it is very late..."* (Informant 4)

Overall, these informants believed that the differences between the original and counterfeit branded fashion goods helped them to be distinctive from the rest; reflecting self-expressiveness. Wearing a "common" design and collection minimises psychosocial risk while wearing a "non-existing" design and collection creates an opportunity for the consumers to stand out from the rest.

DISCUSSION

Exploring the consumers' lived consumption experience further showed that the consumers in this study did not feel anxious or worried if the other society members found out that they used counterfeit branded fashion goods. The consumers revealed their involvement in counterfeit consumption was acceptable, and it was a common practice within society. Similarly, Ahuvia et al., (2013) noted that the social context itself pointed out "everybody did it" and it turned into a trend that should be adhered to by others. Most of the consumers claimed that nothing was wrong if they used counterfeit branded fashion goods and considered themselves as continuing and following the consumption norms practised previously by the reference group, such as friends, family members, and acquaintances.

The theme 'society norms' reveals how consumers who were involved in counterfeit consumption are no longer concerned with any possible social risk, such as embarrassment or fear, when wearing counterfeit branded fashion goods in public. This finding is inconsistent with the literature that found consumers were afraid of the psychosocial risks associated with counterfeit branded fashion goods (Pueschel et al., 2016; Rod et al., 2015; Veloutsou & Bian, 2008). The consumers questioned why they should purchase and wear original branded fashion goods since they were not popular figures who need to impress others. Surprisingly, the consumers admitted that it was challenging to deter their continuous involvement in counterfeit consumption activity as the authoritative body was also involved in this consumption activity. The consumers admitted that they could not stop their participation in counterfeit consumption activity, and it was impossible for them to "let go of" the opportunity offered by the counterfeit market as the society itself approved such a practice. Past studies also reported that counterfeit goods are "too good, to resist", which described the existence of counterfeit markets as beneficial to the consumers (Thaichon & Quach, 2016).

The findings showed low awareness amongst Malaysians on intellectual property rights. The Copyright Act 1987 and the Trade Descriptions Act 201 only apply to parties that sell and distribute counterfeit goods (Hashim et al., 2020). Therefore, consumers in Malaysia are "immortal" from any legal action and free to involve in counterfeit consumption. Koay (2018) asserted that consumers think the likelihood of them getting punished and penalised is very low, and the existence of some popular counterfeit destinations in Malaysia is common to the consumers. As a result, counterfeit consumption has been considered an acceptable practice in Malaysia.

As a collectivist society, complying with the values (e.g., frugality, calculative, and seeking bargain) displays that the consumers are acting in congruence with the social norms, thus resulting in consumers' sense of self-control behaviour. For instance, some informants claimed that the society members preferred generalising that other material belongings are counterfeits; despite they are the original version. Hence, the generalisation of "everybody wears counterfeits" leads to disappointment to these original branded fashion goods consumers as other society

members tend to undermine the status of their branded fashion goods. As a result, these consumers stop purchasing original branded fashion goods and decide to involve in counterfeit consumption due to this society's mentality and acceptance. In a similar vein, Meraviglia (2015) contended that when counterfeit becomes common in a particular place or society, people ought to conclude that the material belongings of others are fake, despite being original.

Exploring consumers' feelings through consumption experiences revealed that not all consumers in this study had fun using counterfeit branded fashion goods. The theme of fear of being caught describes how the consumers had an unpleasant experience when someone had asked about the status of their branded fashion goods. The consumers in this theme were concerned about their image and social status, instead of being satisfied with their ability to use the latest trend and design of branded fashion goods. These consumers revealed their anxious feeling using counterfeit branded fashion goods in the public, as the social group members anticipated that they used the original version that suited their social status. As a result, the consumers in this study decided not to reveal the status of their branded fashion goods to protect their social status from being jeopardised by the image of counterfeit branded fashion goods.

The findings exemplified that society preferred judging other's material possession and financial capability by looking into tangible factors, such as profession and family socio-demographic profile. As a result, they could escape from being caught and surprisingly, continued using counterfeit items despite feeling insecure and anxious. This finding is consistent with a prior study that discovered how social status can deceive the other social group members and enable counterfeit consumers to escape from being caught (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016).

The theme that needs to be different reflects how consumers in this study were bold enough to take risks by showing off their "non-existing" collection and designing counterfeit branded fashion goods before the public. These consumers, who described themselves as "different" with eagerness to wear rare designs, preferred moving out from their "comfort zone" instead of securing their social position. Hence, the consumers discovered that the counterfeit branded fashion goods offered the opportunity to be the "first-person" in creating a unique self-identity amidst their social circle. Instead of feeling insecure wearing a "non-existing" collection, the consumers were satisfied and felt proud to show off their counterfeit branded fashion goods to the public.

This finding is inconsistent with past studies that discovered most counterfeit consumers would "play safe" by wearing the most identical copy of the counterfeit version to prevent themselves from being noticed and caught by others (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Pueschel et al., 2016; Teah et al., 2015). However, consumers in this study applied their extensive knowledge and skills on both categories of branded fashion goods; counterfeit and original, in order to stand out from the crowd by selecting and wearing "rare" designs and collections. This finding is in disagreement with past studies, which depicted that knowledgeable counterfeit consumers were cautious and played safe in choosing and using common design and collection produced by the original branded fashion goods (Bian et al., 2016; Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018; Phau & Teah, 2009; Teah et al., 2015; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). This denotes the self-expressive personality, as the consumers in this study felt that they were free to express their self-image and identity without being afraid of the consequences of revealing the status of their branded fashion goods.

The theme 'showing off' portrays how the society members were obsessed with displaying their "loud brand" that promoted "logofication" culture and lifestyle (Bagheri, 2014; Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006). The lifestyle of showing off material objects in keeping up with others and trends had motivated the consumers to succumb to counterfeit consumption. On the contrary, past studies found that choosing the counterfeit "loud brand" would only expose the consumers to psychosocial risks (J. Chen et al., 2015) unless they hold high social power that can turn to be convincing in carrying such counterfeit "loud brand" (Bian et al., 2015). Due to the conspicuous element of the brand, which is easily noticeable, consumers can be easily caught if someone notes the flaws on the counterfeits, which can lead to social embarrassment. Nevertheless, the consumers in this study claimed that the culture of showing off material objects is a common practice among the society members, whereby each comment and feedback they received from showing off their counterfeit branded fashion goods only led to positive compliments. The consumers admitted that owning a counterfeit version aided them to dissuade negative feelings, such as being left behind by others and conforming to those with whom they wish to be affiliated.

As fashion goods have been characterised as quickly fading and having a short lifecycle (Juggessur & Cohen, 2009), consumers in this study described a feeling of deprivation when they saw any new design or collection in the social media network or at physical stores. They felt "a feeling of lacking" and "regret" if they could not purchase or use the desired brand; signifying the internal tension that urged them to keep consuming counterfeit

branded fashion goods. The theme 'inadequacy' and 'keep up with the trend', describes consumers' insufficient feeling, which can turn into "a must" for them to purchase and use the new design or collection to prevent them from feeling regretful for missing such a good chance. This unpleasant feeling is felt by those with economic crises striving to satiate their desire to purchase "new styles" immediately, thus resorting to counterfeit goods to overcome their negative emotions such as anger, sadness, anxiety, and regret (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020). Despite the haunting inadequate feeling, the consumers neither spent excessively nor indulged in splurge consumption. They succumbed to counterfeit consumption to maintain their interest in using branded fashion goods with minimal investment.

All the main themes represent the critical role of society in legitimising and normalising this unethical consumption activity. Unlike other studies that observed psychosocial risks threatening one's social position and status (Chen et al., 2015; Fastoso et al., 2018; Kim & Johnson, 2014a; Pueschel et al., 2016), this study discovered that the society sought the best deal to keep up with a brand, wherein such trend was portrayed as acceptable behaviour since everyone in their social circle was involved in this counterfeit consumption. Ahuvia et al. (2013) stated that the social context itself, which points out 'everybody did it', encourages other society members to be part of the trend and keep up-dated with others (Haque et al., 2009).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION
This study endeavoured to understand how social values and norms legitimise consumers' involvement in counterfeit consumption activity. Findings reported six main themes that suggested different ways in which societal values played a prominent role in counterfeit consumption. This study proposed to inspire a novel perspective in the realm of counterfeit studies, especially among young adult consumers in Malaysia. By looking at the level of Malaysian consumer awareness on this issue, there is the possibility that counterfeit consumption will maintain and evolve to be a severe problem for the legitimate fashion goods industry. Hence, it establishes a worrying trend, uniquely among the local fashion entrepreneurs, if society approves counterfeit consumption behaviour.

Although the researchers anticipated the challenge of convincing counterfeit consumers to share their consumption experiences and thoughts, an alternative ethnographic or netnographic method is suggested among teenagers in a future study to understand the counterfeit community that existed in our society. Both of the methods provide strong data through comprehensive observation. Thus, participating in community interaction can develop an in-depth understanding of the community culture, particularly counterfeit consumption communities. As intellectual property rights are crucial to Malaysia's economy, targeting youngsters and teenagers as respondents is vital to formulate and intensify awareness to protect Malaysia's future economy. Ergo, the function of social values and norms in legitimising counterfeit consumption practices motivates consumers to sustain their involvement in counterfeit consumption. Instead of feeling insecure and exposed to psychosocial risks, consumers perceived this consumption activity enabled them to be affiliated with others, contributing to social needs satisfaction.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author hereby declares that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

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