

# Exploring the Influence of Consumer Perception, Social Norms, and Face Consciousness on Generation Z's Willingness to Purchase Counterfeit Luxury Goods

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## ABSTRACT

This conceptual study explores the influence of consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness on Generation Z's willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury goods. As the youngest and most digitally connected consumer group, Generation Z presents a unique paradox: a desire for luxury and social status juxtaposed with value-driven, often budget-conscious purchasing behaviors. Drawing on theories of consumer behavior, social identity, and face consciousness, this paper examines how Generation Z's motivations are shaped by perceptions of counterfeit value, peer influence, and a heightened sense of social image. By analyzing these factors, the study provides a framework for understanding Gen Z's attitudes toward counterfeit luxury goods, offering insights for luxury brand managers to reinforce brand authenticity and mitigate counterfeit appeal. Findings suggest that aligning brand strategies with Gen Z's values around authenticity, social responsibility, and exclusivity can play a pivotal role in counteracting the demand for counterfeit products, while fostering a culture of informed and ethical consumption.

**KEYWORDS:** *Consumer Perception, Social Norms, and Face Consciousness on Generation Z*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The global counterfeit luxury goods market has seen unprecedented growth in recent years, driven by advancements in digital platforms that facilitate the sale of counterfeit items. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), counterfeit trade accounted for 3.3% of global trade in 2019, with the luxury goods market being particularly susceptible to counterfeiting (OECD & EUIPO, 2019). The rise of e-commerce and social media has amplified this trend, enabling counterfeit sellers to reach consumers more easily and effectively (Kim & Karpova, 2021).

Generation Z, comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has emerged as a unique and influential consumer demographic in the counterfeit luxury market. This group is characterized by its digital savviness, social media engagement, and complex attitudes toward luxury consumption and social status (Djafarova & Bowes,

2021). Unlike previous generations, Generation Z shows a nuanced approach to luxury: while they value exclusivity and social status, they are also price-sensitive and more likely to consider counterfeit options as a way to access luxury without bearing the high financial cost (Huang et al., 2023).

Studies indicate that Generation Z's motivations for purchasing counterfeit luxury goods are influenced by factors such as social norms, peer pressure, and face consciousness, especially in collectivist cultures where social status and external validation play significant roles (Phau & Teah, 2021). Face consciousness, or the desire to maintain and enhance social status, is particularly relevant in explaining Generation Z's attraction to counterfeit luxury items (Le et al., 2022). This generation's unique characteristics make it essential to explore their consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness to understand their willingness to engage with counterfeit luxury goods.

Generation Z, known for its digital fluency and distinct values, represents a significant consumer group with unique characteristics that differentiate it from previous generations (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). While they are often seen as value-driven and socially conscious, Generation Z consumers exhibit a growing inclination to purchase counterfeit luxury goods, an area that has raised both social and ethical concerns (Bian, Haque, & Smith, 2022). Counterfeit luxury goods not only disrupt legitimate markets but also challenge ethical consumption norms. This paradox—of a seemingly values-based generation engaging in ethically questionable consumption—raises important questions about the factors influencing their purchasing decisions.

Recent studies highlight that Generation Z's motivation to purchase counterfeit goods may stem from a complex mix of social pressures, self-expression, and financial constraints. For instance, research by Hidayat, Amin, and Ibrahim (2023) reveals that social identity and peer influence significantly affect Generation Z's attitudes toward counterfeit goods. Given that counterfeit items allow consumers to mimic high-status brands without the associated cost, there is a growing appeal among younger individuals who are highly conscious of social image but may lack the purchasing power for genuine luxury items (Liao & Wang, 2023).

Consumer perception also plays a key role, as Generation Z tends to weigh the perceived quality of counterfeit goods against the high cost of authentic brands, leading to a normalization of counterfeit purchases (Gistri, Matarazzo, & Simoni, 2023). Despite being aware of the ethical implications, many perceive counterfeit products as an accessible means of participating in luxury culture (Tanjung et al., 2022). Additionally, face consciousness—particularly in collectivist cultures—encourages individuals to seek products that enhance their social image, making counterfeit luxury goods an attractive option (Li, Xie, & Tsai, 2022).

This research aims to explore these motivating factors and delve into why Generation Z may prioritize social and personal aspirations over ethical considerations in purchasing counterfeit luxury goods. Addressing this issue is crucial for understanding the broader implications of counterfeit consumption patterns, which impact not only consumer culture but also ethical standards in global markets.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness on the willingness of Generation Z consumers to purchase counterfeit luxury goods. The growing

market for counterfeit luxury items has drawn significant academic attention, especially in understanding the psychological and social motivations behind these choices. Previous studies indicate that the demand for counterfeit goods is often fueled by individual perceptions of value, social acceptability, and the need for social status or "face" (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009; Phau, Sequeira, & Dix, 2009).

Consumer perception plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward counterfeit products, where factors like perceived value and quality often override ethical concerns (Bian & Veloutsou, 2007). In the context of luxury goods, younger consumers may prioritize the aesthetic appeal and status symbols these items offer, even when counterfeit, as they often align with aspirational goals and identity expression (Wilcox et al., 2009; Li, 2021). Furthermore, social norms influence the extent to which purchasing counterfeit goods is deemed acceptable within a peer group or community (Huang et al., 2020). Generation Z, in particular, is known to be highly influenced by peer dynamics and social media, which can amplify norms that either deter or encourage counterfeit consumption (Jebarajakirthy & Thaichon, 2016).

Another key factor is face consciousness—the desire to maintain a favorable social image and status—prevalent in collectivist cultures but increasingly observed globally among young consumers who view luxury items as markers of prestige (Liang & Xu, 2022). Face consciousness can lead Generation Z consumers to seek counterfeit options to maintain social status at a lower cost, as they strive for social recognition and acceptance (Liang & Xu, 2022; Bian & Forsythe, 2012).

Through examining these elements—consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness—this study seeks to provide a conceptual framework that offers deeper insights into the factors driving counterfeit luxury goods' demand among Generation Z consumers. Such an understanding could offer valuable implications for luxury brands, policymakers, and anti-counterfeiting initiatives aimed at reducing counterfeit consumption.

The primary aim of this study is to examine the drivers behind Generation Z's willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury goods. Specifically, this study investigates the role of three key factors: consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness. The following research questions guide the study:

- 1. How does consumer perception influence Generation Z's willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury goods?**

Consumer perception encompasses attitudes toward the quality, value, and ethics of counterfeit luxury goods. Studies indicate that Generation Z may prioritize value for money, leading some to perceive counterfeits as affordable alternatives to authentic luxury items (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2020). Recent findings suggest that perceptions of counterfeit goods' value and their capacity to project similar social images as genuine luxury brands are critical in influencing purchase intentions among younger consumers (Kim & Kim, 2022). Additionally, ethical considerations—such as views on brand authenticity and intellectual property rights—may vary across demographics and are essential in understanding the appeal of counterfeit items (Wang, Ma, & Zhao, 2023). Thus, this research question aims to unpack the multifaceted perceptions that drive or deter Generation Z from engaging in counterfeit purchases.

## 2. What role do social norms play in shaping attitudes towards counterfeit goods?

Social norms strongly influence consumer behavior, particularly among young adults who often look to peer approval in their decision-making processes. Generation Z's consumption habits are notably shaped by social pressures, which may include the normalization of counterfeit goods within certain social circles (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2021). Studies have shown that when peers or influencers signal acceptance of counterfeit items, the perceived social cost of purchasing such goods is reduced, thus increasing the likelihood of counterfeit consumption (Lee & Yoo, 2023). This question explores how the collective attitudes and behaviors within Generation Z's social networks influence their willingness to purchase counterfeits.

## 3. How does face consciousness impact the willingness to buy counterfeit luxury products?

Face consciousness, or the concern for maintaining a favorable social image, is often associated with societies that emphasize social status and reputation. Generation Z, particularly in collectivist cultures, may seek products that confer a sense of prestige, even if they are not authentic (Shen, Zhang, & Chiou, 2022). This desire to project social status and "save face" can make counterfeit luxury goods attractive as they provide the appearance of wealth without the associated financial burden (Li, Liu, & Sun, 2023). By exploring this question, the study delves into the influence of face consciousness on Generation Z's attitudes towards counterfeit luxury purchases, aiming to reveal the extent to which social image concerns override ethical or legal considerations in purchasing decisions.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Theoretical Background

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), has been widely used to explain consumer decision-making processes, especially in cases where moral or social implications play a role. TPB suggests that behavior is influenced by three main factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes refer to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behavior, subjective norms involve the perceived social pressures to engage in or avoid a behavior, and perceived behavioral control reflects the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior.

Recent studies, such as those by Li et al. (2023) and Kim and Johnson (2022), have applied TPB to examine the intentions behind purchasing counterfeit goods. These studies found that subjective norms significantly influence young consumers, especially within social media and peer group contexts, as Generation Z places high value on social validation. The findings also indicate that while many Generation Z consumers understand the ethical issues around counterfeit goods, their positive attitudes towards the price and availability of counterfeits often override these ethical considerations (Kim & Johnson, 2022).

Social Identity Theory, originally proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), suggests that individuals derive a part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, and they strive to enhance their self-image by adopting behaviors aligned with their perceived social identity. For Generation Z, social identity is often linked

to peer perception and status symbols, which may include luxury goods. This desire to signal a certain social status, even through counterfeit goods, is driven by the need to belong and conform to a peer group's expectations.

Recent research, such as the work by Wang and Chan (2023), has examined how social identity impacts Generation Z's attitudes toward counterfeit luxury products. Findings indicate that face consciousness—a cultural factor where one's public image and social acceptance are prioritized—significantly correlates with counterfeit consumption, as these products allow young consumers to project a desired status at a lower cost (Wang & Chan, 2023). Social media platforms intensify this behavior by fostering social comparison and reinforcing identity-driven consumption patterns.

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) examines the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption. This theory highlights how consumption is embedded in specific cultural and social contexts, suggesting that consumer choices are not merely economic but also reflect personal and group identities, social status, and cultural values (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Research by Zhao et al. (2023) on Generation Z's purchasing habits demonstrates that CCT can help explain why this group might choose counterfeit luxury products. The study found that Generation Z's consumer behaviors are shaped by the pressures of "keeping up" with trends, particularly in the realm of luxury fashion, where owning branded items is equated with social prestige. These young consumers often view counterfeit luxury goods as a means to participate in the luxury culture without the associated financial burden, thereby fulfilling their social desires within their economic constraints (Zhao et al., 2023).

Perceived value is a critical factor influencing consumer decisions to purchase counterfeit goods. Many consumers see counterfeit items as high-value substitutes for authentic brands, offering the desired aesthetic and functionality at a fraction of the cost. Studies show that individuals with a strong value orientation towards price are often more likely to buy counterfeit goods, prioritizing perceived savings over brand authenticity (Pham & Nasir, 2023). When consumers perceive that the counterfeit item closely replicates the branded product's appearance and utility, they may assess it as a good deal, despite the product's lower quality and lack of brand prestige (Wang et al., 2022).

Quality perception significantly impacts consumer behavior toward counterfeit products. Even though consumers may recognize that counterfeit goods are generally inferior in terms of materials and durability, many believe they offer adequate quality for their price, especially in categories where external appearance matters more than functionality (Zhou & Li, 2023). The perceived quality is often tied to the product's ability to visually mimic the authentic brand, satisfying the consumer's need for a luxury look (Gao & Song, 2022). However, repeated purchases of counterfeits are less likely when consumers have experienced a notable drop in quality or encountered functional issues with these products (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Ethical considerations play a complex role in consumer attitudes towards counterfeit goods. Although many consumers are aware that purchasing counterfeits may support illegal activities, including copyright infringement and unethical labor practices, these concerns often take a back seat to other motivations, such as social prestige

and financial savings (Yoon et al., 2023). Studies reveal that some consumers justify purchasing counterfeits by downplaying the ethical consequences, rationalizing that large luxury brands can absorb the financial impact or that their actions are inconsequential on a global scale (Lee et al., 2022). However, ethical awareness campaigns by brand owners and regulatory authorities can impact consumer attitudes, especially among younger consumers who are increasingly responsive to ethical messaging (Park & Kim, 2023).

The interaction of perceived value, quality, and ethical considerations often results in a complex decision-making process for consumers. Individuals who value affordability and perceive the quality of counterfeits as acceptable are more likely to justify the ethical compromises associated with these purchases (Gao & Song, 2022). Additionally, social factors and peer influence often reinforce these perceptions, especially when individuals see counterfeit consumption as a socially acceptable or even aspirational choice within certain communities (Pham & Nasir, 2023). Consequently, consumer perception of counterfeit goods is influenced by a blend of personal values, ethical stances, and perceived functionality, all of which drive the choice to purchase these products despite potential ethical and quality drawbacks.

## **B. Social Norms and Purchasing Behavior**

Social norms are powerful determinants of consumer behavior, particularly in the context of conformity and status-seeking behaviors. Studies suggest that social norms can significantly impact the decision-making process, especially in younger generations who are more influenced by peer acceptance and societal expectations. Social norms, both descriptive (what others are doing) and injunctive (what others approve of), shape individuals' consumption choices as they seek validation or approval within their social circles (Zhou et al., 2023).

Younger generations, including Generation Z, are particularly susceptible to the influence of social norms in their purchasing decisions. Generation Z is highly connected through social media platforms, where peer influence and social comparison are prevalent (Lim et al., 2022). Social media platforms often amplify these normative pressures, as users observe and emulate the behaviors and purchasing choices of peers, influencers, and celebrities. This has been linked to an increased likelihood of purchasing both luxury and counterfeit goods, driven by the desire to keep up with peer trends and standards (Park & Lee, 2021).

Peer influence, a critical component of social norms, plays a vital role in shaping consumption behaviors among younger consumers. Studies show that when individuals observe others within their social network engaging in certain behaviors, they are more likely to adopt similar behaviors, even if it contradicts their personal values (Huang & Kim, 2022). For instance, if a peer group displays acceptance of counterfeit luxury goods, individuals within that group may feel less inhibited about purchasing these products themselves.

Further, peer influence can also serve as a form of indirect pressure, especially for younger consumers who are keen on fitting in. Research indicates that Generation Z consumers, for example, are significantly influenced by their friends' purchasing behaviors and social values. This effect is even more pronounced when peers openly endorse products or share their purchases on social media (Sharma et al., 2022).

Cultural attitudes, particularly in collectivist societies, often strengthen the role of social norms in consumer behavior. In such societies, conformity to group norms and the emphasis on social harmony can drive individuals to make consumption choices that align with their community's expectations (Zhu & Wang, 2023). This is evident in the purchase of counterfeit luxury goods, where cultural attitudes toward luxury consumption and social status may override individual ethical concerns. For instance, in some East Asian cultures, the concept of "face" or social reputation may drive individuals to seek luxury-branded items, regardless of their authenticity, to maintain or enhance social standing (Chen et al., 2023).

Recent research has specifically explored the link between social norms and counterfeit purchases among younger generations. For example, a study by Wong et al. (2023) found that social norms significantly influence the propensity of Generation Z consumers to purchase counterfeit goods, especially when there is a perception that such behavior is widespread and socially acceptable. Additionally, cultural attitudes that view counterfeit consumption as a means to achieve desired social status without financial strain further normalize this behavior among peers (Xiao et al., 2023).

**Concept and Definition:** Face consciousness, rooted in East Asian cultures, particularly China, is an individual's concern about how they are perceived by others and the social value or "face" they maintain (Huang, Hu, & Wang, 2023). Face consciousness represents a self-monitoring trait that can drive behaviors aimed at preserving or enhancing one's social image (Li, Zhang, & Liu, 2022). In consumer contexts, this often translates to a preference for luxury and status-signaling goods, as these items convey prestige, success, and social approval (Zhu & He, 2021).

**Role in Consumer Behavior:** Consumers with high face consciousness tend to place significant emphasis on the social visibility of their purchases, particularly items that signal wealth or status, like luxury brands. Recent studies show that these consumers are more likely to purchase luxury goods, as they perceive such products as tools to enhance their social standing (Lee, Hong, & Kim, 2023). Furthermore, face-conscious consumers may prefer well-known luxury brands over lesser-known ones, as brand recognition also contributes to perceived social value (Wang & Yu, 2022).

**Face Consciousness and Counterfeit Purchases:** Interestingly, face consciousness also influences the purchase of counterfeit luxury goods, especially among younger consumers with limited financial resources but strong social status aspirations. For example, research by Choi and Kim (2023) indicates that Generation Z consumers with high face consciousness are likely to purchase counterfeit luxury items, viewing them as cost-effective alternatives that still allow them to project an image of wealth and sophistication. This tendency highlights how face consciousness can lead to paradoxical behaviors: while consumers desire genuine status signals, they may turn to counterfeits to fulfill similar social expectations when authentic items are financially out of reach.

**Face Consciousness in Different Cultural Contexts:** While the concept of face consciousness is prevalent in East Asian cultures, it is increasingly relevant in global consumer markets. Recent cross-cultural studies suggest



that in societies where social approval and group identity are prioritized, face-conscious consumers may exhibit similar luxury brand preferences. According to Kim, Park, and Jang (2023), even Western markets have shown a rise in face-related purchasing behaviors, albeit to a lesser extent than in collectivist cultures.

**Implications for Luxury Brands and Marketing:** For luxury brands, understanding the role of face consciousness in consumer decision-making is crucial. Marketing strategies that appeal to social image, exclusivity, and prestige can be particularly effective for face-conscious consumers. Brands can create targeted campaigns that highlight these elements to attract such consumers (Chen & Xu, 2023). Furthermore, with face-conscious consumers showing a susceptibility to counterfeit goods, luxury brands might consider anti-counterfeit measures and emphasize the unique quality and prestige of authentic products to differentiate from replicas (Zhou & Li, 2022).

### **C. Characteristics, Values, and Consumption Patterns of Generation Z**

Generation Z is the first generation to grow up with the internet, social media, and mobile technology, which significantly influences their consumer behavior. Their online presence and reliance on digital media for product research and brand interaction make them more informed and discerning consumers. According to Priporas et al. (2017), this digital savviness gives them easy access to product information and comparisons, including awareness of counterfeit and authentic luxury goods. They are highly influenced by online reviews, influencers, and social media marketing, all of which play a role in shaping their perceptions of luxury and counterfeit products (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Despite their engagement with luxury, Generation Z values authenticity and ethical business practices. They tend to favor brands that are transparent about their processes and socially responsible (Williams & Kamal, 2020). However, a paradox exists wherein some Generation Z consumers, especially those on lower budgets, may justify purchasing counterfeit goods as a means of accessing luxury status without the premium cost, a behavior influenced by social and peer norms (Alfansi & Atmaja, 2019).

Generation Z is highly influenced by social trends and peer behaviors, especially on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where influencers often display luxury items (Hassan & Lee, 2021). The desire to project a certain image, often driven by "face consciousness," may lead them to seek alternatives to expensive luxury items, including counterfeits, to maintain social status (Loureiro et al., 2021). This tendency highlights the influence of social norms on their willingness to purchase luxury goods, even if counterfeit.

Generation Z consumers often view luxury products as symbols of self-expression and personal identity. Loureiro and colleagues (2021) point out that, for many in this demographic, luxury goods serve as a way to convey status and identity, aligning with their value of self-expression. However, due to budget constraints, they may resort to counterfeit goods as affordable alternatives to luxury brands.

While Generation Z is often characterized by their awareness of social issues and preference for sustainable brands, studies have shown that they may still be drawn to counterfeit luxury goods under certain conditions



(Alfansi & Atmaja, 2019). For example, while they value sustainability, they may justify counterfeit purchases by downplaying ethical concerns, especially if these products provide the aesthetic or social prestige associated with luxury brands without the high cost.

This generation's heightened exposure to trends and social media-driven FOMO can contribute to impulsive buying behaviors, especially for luxury items that are trendy or endorsed by influencers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). This impulsivity, coupled with a desire to keep up with trends, can lead them to purchase counterfeit goods as a quicker and more affordable way to achieve a desired look or status symbol.

### III. METHODOLOGY

the proposed model examines the hypothesized relationships between consumer perception, social norms, face consciousness, and Generation Z's willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury goods. **Consumer perception** is an essential factor, encompassing how individuals evaluate counterfeit products based on attributes such as perceived quality, value, and ethical implications. Recent research shows that positive consumer perception—especially in terms of affordability and acceptable quality—can reduce perceived risk and enhance purchasing intentions for counterfeit items (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Furnham, 2023; Chen, Sun, & Li, 2022). For Generation Z, balancing the desire for luxury with budget constraints often makes counterfeit options appealing, providing an opportunity to experience luxury at a lower cost (Lee & Cha, 2023). Thus, we hypothesize that positive consumer perception of counterfeit luxury goods will increase the willingness to purchase (H1).

**Social norms** represent another critical factor in this model, especially since younger generations like Generation Z are often significantly influenced by their social environment and peer approval (Zhou & Wong, 2023). Literature suggests that social norms can act as a deterrent to purchasing counterfeit products, especially when strong norms emphasize ethical consumption and discourage counterfeit use (Nguyen & Pham, 2023). In contrast, if counterfeit goods are widely accepted within a peer group, individuals may feel encouraged to engage in similar behaviors (Ahuja & Pattnaik, 2023). Accordingly, the model hypothesizes that strong social norms against counterfeit products will reduce the willingness to purchase them (H2).

**Face consciousness**—the desire to maintain social status and project a favorable self-image—plays a significant role in driving individuals to seek luxury items as symbols of prestige (Kim, Choi, & Kim, 2023). For Generation Z, this concept can motivate counterfeit purchases when these items provide an affordable way to display status through recognizable brands without incurring high costs (Wong, Lau, & Lam, 2022). Since face-conscious individuals often prioritize image and social perception, they may find counterfeit luxury goods attractive as a means of meeting these social expectations. Therefore, we hypothesize that higher face consciousness will lead to a greater willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury goods (H3).

The model further considers the **interaction between consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness**. For instance, strong social norms against counterfeit purchases may moderate the effect of face consciousness, reducing the likelihood of purchase even when status concerns are high (Lee & Kim, 2022).

Additionally, positive consumer perceptions of counterfeit goods might reinforce face-conscious motives, intensifying the willingness to buy these items (Ahmed, Habib, & Alam, 2023). This interplay suggests that consumer perception and social norms may jointly influence how face consciousness impacts purchasing decisions.

Overall, this model provides a conceptual foundation for understanding the psychological and social factors influencing Generation Z's counterfeit luxury goods purchasing behavior. By exploring these dynamics, this study contributes to existing consumer behavior literature while offering valuable insights for marketers, luxury brands, and policymakers addressing the counterfeiting phenomenon.

## **D. Hypotheses Development**

### **H1: Positive Consumer Perception of Counterfeit Luxury Goods Increases the Willingness to Purchase**

The hypothesis that positive consumer perception of counterfeit luxury goods leads to a higher willingness to purchase aligns with findings that consumers often assess counterfeit products based on perceived value, quality, and moral considerations. Recent research highlights that when consumers perceive counterfeit luxury goods as offering acceptable quality at a lower price, they are more likely to consider purchasing them despite ethical concerns (Prasetyo & Liem, 2023). Moreover, attitudes toward counterfeits are often shaped by the perceived economic benefit over ethical drawbacks, especially among younger consumers who may prioritize affordability over brand authenticity (Chen & Cheng, 2022).

### **H2: Strong Social Norms Against Counterfeit Products Decrease the Willingness to Purchase**

Social norms play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior, especially when societal expectations disapprove of counterfeits. Recent studies suggest that when social norms strongly discourage purchasing counterfeit items, consumers are less inclined to buy them, as violating these norms can lead to social stigma (Zhang et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant in cultures or subgroups where there is a high regard for authenticity and ethical behavior. Research has shown that social influence from family, peers, and societal expectations can deter individuals from purchasing counterfeit goods by associating such purchases with negative social judgments (Lee & Yang, 2022).

### **H3: Higher Face Consciousness Leads to a Greater Willingness to Purchase Counterfeit Luxury Goods**

Face consciousness, which reflects the importance of maintaining social status and image, can significantly impact the willingness to buy luxury goods, including counterfeits. This hypothesis builds on research showing that individuals with high face consciousness may seek counterfeit luxury goods as a way to project a certain image without incurring the high costs of genuine items (Huang & Wen, 2023). In cultures where "face" is crucial, counterfeit products can serve as a cost-effective way to fulfill social expectations for luxury appearances, especially among younger generations like Generation Z (Qiu & Xiao, 2022).

## IV. DISCUSSION

### E. Consumer Perception

Consumer perception plays a crucial role in Generation Z's attitudes toward counterfeit luxury goods, with perceived value, quality, and ethical considerations acting as primary influencers. **Perceived value** emerges as a strong driver, as Generation Z, noted for its digital savviness and access to online retail, often views counterfeit luxury products as a cost-effective alternative to authentic items. According to Zhang and Kim (2023), the affordability and accessibility of counterfeit goods, especially those closely resembling luxury brands in design and functionality, significantly boost their appeal to younger consumers who may not have the means to purchase genuine luxury items. Similarly, Jin and Ryu (2023) argue that this perceived "value for money" encourages counterfeit purchases among Generation Z, who often view counterfeits as a practical substitute.

**Perceived quality** is also a central aspect of consumer perception, particularly as advances in technology allow counterfeit manufacturers to replicate luxury goods with increasing accuracy. Kim and Shin (2022) found that when Generation Z perceives the quality of a counterfeit to be nearly on par with the authentic product, their willingness to purchase the counterfeit item rises considerably. Additionally, Liu et al. (2023) highlighted that Generation Z often evaluates product quality through online reviews and endorsements from social media influencers, which can blur distinctions between counterfeit and authentic products in terms of perceived quality.

While Generation Z is generally socially conscious and supportive of ethical consumerism, **ethical considerations** surrounding counterfeits often have a less decisive impact on their purchasing behavior. Chen and Tan (2023) revealed that, although younger consumers may express concerns about the ethical implications of counterfeits, they frequently rationalize these purchases by minimizing the perceived harm to brands or viewing it as a form of anti-establishment behavior. This contradiction between ethical beliefs and actual purchasing choices suggests a complex relationship where moral considerations are secondary to perceived value and quality.

Social influence further shapes Generation Z's perception of counterfeit goods, with social media and peer opinions playing significant roles. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have normalized the presence of counterfeit products, shaping how young consumers perceive them. Park and Lee (2023) found that the social validation of counterfeits through influencers or friends on these platforms enhances their acceptance among Generation Z. This generation's focus on social approval and peer acceptance often means that endorsements of counterfeit goods from friends or influencers can overshadow concerns about authenticity and ethics (Wu et al., 2023). Together, these factors illustrate a nuanced landscape where consumer perception among Generation Z is shaped by a complex interplay of value, quality, ethics, and social influence.

## F. Social Norm

Social norms play a critical role in influencing individuals' attitudes and behaviors, particularly in a consumer context. For Generation Z, who are heavily influenced by their social circles and digital communities, social norms around luxury and authenticity can significantly impact their decision-making. Research shows that when social norms favor authentic luxury purchases, individuals are less likely to engage in counterfeit consumption, as it goes against the collective values upheld by their social group (Chen et al., 2023; Kwak et al., 2022). Conversely, if counterfeit purchases are normalized within certain peer groups, the likelihood of purchasing counterfeit items may increase.

Social norms can mediate the relationship between personal values (like ethical stance) and the willingness to purchase counterfeit goods. A recent study by **Wang and Zhang (2023)** found that social acceptance of counterfeit goods mediates the effect of individual ethics on purchase intention. When individuals perceive that their peers or society at large do not stigmatize counterfeit goods, their ethical concerns may be less influential in determining their purchasing decisions. This is especially relevant in cultures or groups where material display is valued, as the appearance of affluence can sometimes override the importance of authenticity.

Social norms can also act as a moderator, enhancing or reducing the influence of other factors, such as face consciousness and consumer perception, on the likelihood of purchasing counterfeit goods. **Lin and Shen (2022)** highlight that in groups where high status and appearance are critical, social norms can reinforce the pursuit of luxury, even if that means turning to counterfeit options when genuine items are unaffordable. Thus, the desire to maintain a certain social status can be moderated by social norms, with individuals balancing their financial limitations against the perceived social benefit of owning a luxury-like product.

Social norms emanate from multiple sources, including family expectations, peer group attitudes, and societal values. Generation Z, especially those active on social media, often derive their behavioral cues from a combination of these sources. **Kim et al. (2023)** argue that online influencers and peer groups shape Generation Z's perception of luxury and authenticity, subtly endorsing counterfeit goods when they are framed as accessible alternatives to luxury brands. The study also notes that social media platforms, where counterfeit products are often glamorized, can serve as breeding grounds for the normalization of counterfeit consumption.

In the context of Generation Z, social norms extend beyond physical interactions to digital and social media environments. Digital communities can rapidly spread trends and shape attitudes toward counterfeit luxury goods, normalizing these products through social acceptance and popularity. **Liao and Xu (2023)** discuss how platforms like Instagram and TikTok contribute to a "democratization of luxury" mentality, where the emphasis is on the appearance of luxury rather than the authenticity of the item. This digital influence often overrides traditional societal values, promoting a culture where appearance and perceived status are prioritized over ethical considerations.

## **G. Face Consciousness**

Face consciousness refers to an individual's concern with maintaining a positive social image and reputation, especially within collectivist societies where social harmony and public perception hold high importance (Lin et al., 2022). This concept often manifests in consumer behavior as a heightened desire to own luxury items that symbolize status, wealth, and success, as these goods help individuals project an idealized image to their peers (Yang & Liu, 2023). For Generation Z, a cohort highly engaged in digital media, the visibility and influence of social status symbols have become more pronounced, intensifying the desire to acquire luxury goods, even if they are counterfeit (Zhou et al., 2023).

In a recent study, Zhou et al. (2023) observed that face consciousness significantly influences the purchasing intentions of counterfeit goods among younger consumers, particularly when authentic luxury items are financially inaccessible. In such cases, counterfeit products provide a "shortcut" to the desired social recognition, as they enable consumers to maintain their desired image without the financial burden associated with genuine luxury brands. This finding aligns with Yang and Liu's (2023) assertion that the symbolic value of luxury products, rather than their authenticity, often drives consumer preferences, especially among young consumers facing economic constraints.

Social media further amplifies the impact of face consciousness by creating spaces where individuals frequently compare their lifestyles and possessions to those of others. Lin et al. (2022) found that Generation Z consumers are particularly susceptible to social comparison pressures on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where luxury goods are often showcased as symbols of a successful and desirable lifestyle. This exposure not only reinforces the association between luxury brands and social status but also reduces the stigma associated with counterfeit goods, as the visual similarity often suffices to achieve the desired impression in online and offline social interactions (Zhao et al., 2022).

Additionally, Zhao et al. (2022) suggest that in many cases, Generation Z consumers rationalize their counterfeit purchases by emphasizing the utility of the social image these items offer over the authenticity of the product itself. This pragmatic approach to luxury consumption reflects a shift in values, where the end goal—social recognition—takes precedence over ethical or brand loyalty concerns. Consequently, face consciousness acts as a key motivator for counterfeit purchases, as it offers a feasible way to achieve symbolic consumption at a lower economic cost.

## **H. Interplay of Constructs**

In examining how consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness interact, it is essential to consider how these constructs might amplify or moderate each other in influencing Generation Z's purchasing behaviors. Each of these constructs has both direct and indirect effects that shape the intention to buy counterfeit luxury goods.

Consumer perception, encompassing attitudes toward quality, risk, and value of counterfeit products, can serve as both a mediator and moderator in this context. Perceptions of quality and affordability in counterfeit luxury goods may diminish ethical concerns, especially if social norms are relaxed (Chaudhry & Stumpf, 2022). For instance, if social norms within a peer group are lenient about counterfeit products, positive consumer perceptions (e.g., low perceived risk or high perceived value) can directly reinforce purchasing intentions (Wilcox et al., 2023). Moreover, consumer perception often moderates face consciousness by either amplifying or reducing the willingness to choose counterfeit items based on the perceived quality and status the counterfeit item might confer (Jiang & Cova, 2023).

Social norms heavily influence the impact of face consciousness on counterfeit purchasing decisions. In societies or groups where there is high social acceptance of counterfeit goods, face consciousness can strongly predict counterfeit purchases (Lee & Workman, 2023). Conversely, in groups where counterfeit goods are socially frowned upon, face consciousness may drive individuals to seek authentic products, aligning status desires with societal expectations (Sun et al., 2023). For Generation Z, peer influence and the desire for social acceptance play a critical role, especially in cultures that place high value on public image (Kim et al., 2022). Thus, social norms can act as a conditional factor, determining whether face consciousness drives individuals toward counterfeit or authentic goods.

Face consciousness often mediates the relationship between social norms and consumer perception. When individuals are highly conscious of social status, they may perceive counterfeit goods as a means of accessing luxury at a lower price while still achieving the desired social image (Li et al., 2023). In this case, the desire to maintain face might transform the perceived value of counterfeit goods positively, aligning with the social acceptability of these products within a particular peer group. Generation Z, known for a pragmatic approach to luxury (often prioritizing appearance over authenticity), may therefore be more likely to purchase counterfeit goods if they believe these products fulfill social expectations at a lower cost (Wong et al., 2023).

In real-world scenarios, these constructs interact dynamically. For example, if social norms within a Generation Z peer group are tolerant of counterfeits, and face consciousness is high, consumer perception of counterfeit goods may shift positively, increasing purchase likelihood. Studies on Generation Z in East Asia reveal that where social acceptance of counterfeit goods is prevalent, face-conscious individuals are likelier to perceive counterfeit products favorably (Wang & Yang, 2023). Thus, the combined influence of lenient social norms and face consciousness can create an environment where counterfeit luxury goods become an accepted substitute for authentic items, with consumer perception serving as the reinforcing factor.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

This study offers significant contributions to consumer behavior theory by examining Generation Z's motivations to purchase counterfeit luxury goods through the lenses of consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness. Generation Z, with distinct values and behaviors, displays unique attitudes toward



authenticity, social influence, and status, setting them apart from previous generations (Williams & Page, 2011; Bilgihan, 2016). Understanding their purchasing behavior toward counterfeits reveals new insights into how perceived value and ethical considerations play out among younger consumers. Prior studies indicate that perceived quality and affordability strongly influence counterfeit purchase intentions (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009). This study builds on these findings, showing that Generation Z often values immediate gratification and financial savings over authenticity, aligning with Bian et al. (2016), who noted that Generation Z may prioritize practical benefits over ethical concerns, challenging traditional models that prioritize brand loyalty and ethical consumption.

The study also enriches the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) by exploring social norms' role in counterfeit purchases. Recent research shows that social norms, particularly peer influence, significantly impact Generation Z's purchasing choices, with peers serving as key referents in decision-making (Gentina, Shrum, & Lowrey, 2020). By focusing on counterfeit luxury goods, this study highlights how peer acceptance of counterfeits can reduce the social stigma typically associated with such purchases, which aligns with Hennigs, Wiedmann, and Klarman's (2015) findings on the normalization of counterfeit items within certain social contexts. This shift in social norms presents an evolved view of Generation Z's social conformity, suggesting that the acceptance of counterfeits within peer groups may enhance the appeal of these products.

Additionally, this study adds depth to the concept of "face consciousness" as a driver for counterfeit purchases. Rooted in collectivist cultures, face consciousness reflects the desire to maintain or elevate one's social status, often achieved through luxury consumption (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Li, Kim, & Lee, 2016). Despite their globalized outlook, Generation Z continues to exhibit strong face consciousness, especially in collectivist societies, highlighting the importance of social image in consumption choices. For some, counterfeit luxury goods provide a cost-effective way to project a desired social status, supporting Shukla's (2012) findings on luxury brand perceptions in emerging markets.

Through these theoretical contributions, this study advances consumer behavior theory by revealing Generation Z's distinct motivations in counterfeit consumption, emphasizing factors such as affordability, social influence, and status projection. This study invites further empirical research to examine these relationships across different cultural settings and offers luxury brands and policymakers a better understanding of the nuanced motivations behind counterfeit purchases. This framework, grounded in consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness, provides a foundational step for future research on how counterfeit markets may evolve with younger generations.

To address the growing appeal of counterfeit luxury goods, luxury brands and regulatory bodies can adopt various strategies. Luxury brands, for instance, can benefit from **brand authenticity campaigns** that highlight their unique heritage, craftsmanship, and ethical production processes, which differentiate genuine products from counterfeit ones. Studies show that Generation Z, in particular, values authenticity and transparency, finding greater appeal in products that reflect ethical standards and craftsmanship (Ko et al., 2021). Major luxury brands,

such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton, have successfully launched campaigns focusing on these qualities, strengthening brand loyalty and deterring counterfeit purchases (Kim & Koo, 2022). Another effective approach is **social influence marketing**. Given Generation Z's strong connection to social media and susceptibility to the opinions of online influencers, luxury brands can collaborate with trusted influencers to endorse the exclusivity and value of authentic products. This strategy has been effective for brands like Chanel and Balenciaga, who have engaged influencers that resonate with younger audiences, helping to shift preferences away from counterfeit goods (Hwang & Zhang, 2021; Xu & Pratt, 2023).

In addition, technology offers promising tools for enhancing product authentication. The use of **augmented reality (AR)** and **blockchain verification** enables brands to embed tamper-proof digital identifiers into products, providing consumers with easy-to-use verification systems. Blockchain-based verification, adopted by brands such as LVMH and Prada, enhances transparency and adds value to the consumer experience, protecting both brand image and consumer trust (Ding et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2023).

On the regulatory side, **consumer education initiatives** are crucial. Anti-counterfeiting organizations and regulatory bodies can reduce demand by educating Generation Z consumers on the ethical, economic, and safety implications of counterfeit purchases. Campaigns like the EU's "Buy Real" initiative aim to inform consumers about identifying counterfeit products and understanding their broader social impact, potentially discouraging purchases of fake goods (European Union Intellectual Property Office, 2023). **Strengthening penalties for online counterfeit sales** is also necessary. Recent studies indicate that increased penalties and monitoring of e-commerce platforms can reduce counterfeit listings, encouraging a shift toward authentic products (Bian et al., 2022). The 2023 U.S. "SHOP SAFE Act," which mandates that platforms actively monitor and remove counterfeit listings, has set a strong precedent for tackling counterfeit sales online (U.S. Congress, 2023).

Finally, due to the international nature of counterfeit trade, **cross-border collaboration** is essential. Research underscores the need for international cooperation to effectively enforce anti-counterfeiting laws and track the production and distribution of counterfeit goods. The World Customs Organization (WCO), for example, collaborates with member countries to strengthen cross-border monitoring, targeting large-scale counterfeit networks to disrupt supply chains (Tan et al., 2023; World Customs Organization, 2023). Together, these strategies provide a comprehensive framework for addressing both the demand and supply sides of the counterfeit market, fostering a shift in consumer behavior toward authentic luxury products.

The findings of this conceptual paper reveal key insights into the factors influencing Generation Z's willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury goods, with particular emphasis on consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness. First, **consumer perception** emerges as a pivotal factor; many young consumers view counterfeit products as affordable yet stylish alternatives to authentic luxury items. Positive consumer perceptions, driven by economic value and perceived quality, increase the appeal of counterfeits, allowing Generation Z to enjoy the aesthetics and status associated with luxury brands without the high price tag. As Lu and Miao (2023) explain, this generation's value-driven approach to counterfeit consumption positions these items

as acceptable substitutes, especially in fulfilling status-related needs. Supporting this, Zhou, Xu, and Li (2023) highlight that the notion of “status on a budget” resonates strongly among younger consumers who seek luxury’s symbolic value without its prohibitive cost.

Additionally, **social norms** significantly shape attitudes towards counterfeit purchases. When the social environment—peers, family, and cultural expectations—is permissive or neutral regarding counterfeit goods, young consumers are more inclined to view such purchases as socially acceptable. For example, Zhang, Huang, and Fan (2022) note that social influences, especially among peers, can normalize the buying of counterfeit products, making these items more appealing even when ethical considerations arise. This phenomenon is further supported by Tan and Lee (2023), who observe that peer endorsement reduces the stigma around counterfeits, as such purchases are viewed as financially savvy rather than morally dubious.

Finally, **face consciousness**, the desire to maintain social standing and avoid social embarrassment, is a strong motivator among Generation Z, particularly in cultures that emphasize social status. Liu and Wang (2023) find that for many young consumers, counterfeit luxury goods allow them to project an image of affluence without incurring the high costs associated with genuine luxury items. High face consciousness thus leads individuals to prioritize appearance over authenticity, as the symbolic value of luxury goods in social interactions often outweighs concerns about authenticity (Kim et al., 2023). This study underscores that, for Generation Z, counterfeit luxury items can serve as tools for social validation, enabling them to meet status expectations in appearance-oriented settings.

These findings illustrate the complex interplay of economic, social, and cultural motivations that drive Generation Z’s engagement with counterfeit luxury goods. The insights provided by this conceptual model serve as a foundation for future empirical research and offer implications for luxury brands and policymakers, who can use this understanding to address and potentially mitigate the growing demand for counterfeit products.

This conceptual study provides valuable insights into the motivations behind Generation Z’s willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury goods, yet several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the lack of empirical data constrains the study’s ability to validate the conceptual framework through observed evidence. Future research should prioritize quantitative studies—such as surveys or experiments—to empirically test the proposed relationships between consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness in counterfeit purchasing behavior (Chen et al., 2023). Additionally, focusing exclusively on Generation Z may limit the generalizability of findings, as different age cohorts may hold distinct values concerning luxury, status, and authenticity (Kim & Hong, 2022). Comparative studies across age groups could provide a broader understanding of how motivations to purchase counterfeit goods vary generationally. Cultural context also plays a pivotal role, particularly concerning “face consciousness,” which is often more influential in collectivist cultures like those in East Asia compared to individualist Western cultures (Zhou & Zhang, 2023). Cross-cultural studies that examine dimensions such as individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance could illuminate how these cultural factors affect the impact of social norms and face consciousness on counterfeit consumption.

Moreover, given that Generation Z is heavily influenced by digital platforms and social media, evolving digital dynamics are another area that warrants investigation. Understanding the influence of online interactions and social media campaigns on perceptions of counterfeit goods could reveal whether digital environments reinforce or weaken social norms around counterfeits (Xu & Chen, 2023). Lastly, ethical considerations are crucial in understanding counterfeit consumption, as recent research shows that moral judgments about counterfeit goods vary and significantly impact purchasing intentions (Li & Luo, 2024). Future research integrating ethical dimensions could thus provide a more comprehensive view of the motivations behind counterfeit consumption, especially among Generation Z. Together, these avenues for further research could greatly enhance our understanding of the interplay between consumer psychology, social norms, cultural values, and ethical considerations in counterfeit luxury consumption.

In understanding Generation Z's motivations for purchasing counterfeit luxury goods, this study highlights the nuanced interplay of consumer perception, social norms, and face consciousness in shaping purchasing intentions. Generation Z, often described as socially conscious yet value-driven (Barakat et al., 2022), demonstrates complex motivations that luxury brands and policymakers must consider to address the growing market for counterfeit goods. The influence of social media and digital platforms, which serve as prime channels for counterfeit luxury products, adds to the challenge, as they shape and amplify perceptions of luxury and social status among Gen Z consumers (Kim & Jang, 2023).

Research indicates that Generation Z is particularly responsive to authenticity and social influence, where peer endorsements and community norms can significantly alter their purchasing behaviors, even toward counterfeit products (Chaudhry & Stumpf, 2023). As such, Generation Z's propensity to buy counterfeit goods cannot be seen merely as an economic choice but as a reflection of deeper social motivations and identity expressions (Lee et al., 2023). This highlights a critical area for luxury brands: the need to craft brand messages that emphasize authenticity, transparency, and unique brand heritage. Such strategies may dissuade counterfeit purchases by appealing to Gen Z's value for genuine, socially responsible products (Smith & Hermans, 2024).

For luxury brand management, this study suggests that understanding the consumer psychology of Generation Z is pivotal. By aligning marketing strategies to appeal to Gen Z's desire for exclusivity, yet balancing it with accessible entry points, brands can create experiences that counteract the appeal of counterfeits (Barakat et al., 2022). Furthermore, integrating educational campaigns about the economic and social impact of counterfeit goods can help foster a culture of informed consumption (Kim & Jang, 2023).

This study contributes to consumer behavior theory by addressing how modern generational characteristics influence attitudes towards authenticity and counterfeit consumption. The findings suggest that combating counterfeit demand among Generation Z requires a multifaceted approach that involves consumer education, social influence strategies, and the reinforcement of brand authenticity. Future research should continue exploring these dynamics in cross-cultural contexts and further examine how digital media and influencer culture impact Gen Z's attitudes toward counterfeits.

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