Subjective Morality, Moral Dissonance and Temporal Coping in Counterfeit Luxury Consumption

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Abstract

Current research aims to understand how subjective morality in counterfeit luxury consumption influences consumers' experiences regarding their consumption, moral dissonance and how they cope with such issue. Subjective interpretation of morality in the context of counterfeit luxury consumption leads these consumers to experience their consumptions differently, to face moral dissonance at different times, and to cope with problems with different strategies over the course of counterfeit consumption journey (i.e. pre-purchase, purchase, consumption and post-consumption). 1) Phenomenological interviews on 31 informants who purchase and own both counterfeit and authentic luxury fashion products, 2) netnography and 3) autoethnography were conducted to understand the naturalistic setting of counterfeit luxury market in Bangkok, Thailand. Findings suggest that subjective morality from perspectives of counterfeit luxury consumers forms what constitutes rights and wrongs leading to these consumers to experience their consumption differently, feeling negative feelings from moral dissonance at different times, and coping with such feelings using different temporal coping strategies throughout their counterfeit luxury consumption journeys. In addition, findings from current research provides practitioners, policy makers and luxury brands with understandings on what, how, when and on who to implement strategic interventions and brand building in order to encourage or nudge these consumers to moral consumption.

Keywords: Morality, Moral Dissonance, Moral Coping Strategies, Counterfeit Luxury, Consumer Psychology

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ศีลธรรมเชิงอัตวิสัย ความขัดแย้งทางศีลธรรม และการรับมือตามเวลาในการบริโภคสินค้าฟุ่มเฟือยเลียนแบบ

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อทำความเข้าใจศีลธรรมเชิงอัตวิสัยในการบริโภคสินค้าฟุ่มเฟือยเลียนแบบซึ่งมีอิทธิพลต่อประสบการณ์ของผู้บริโภค โดยกระบวนการวิจัยแบ่งออกเป็น 3 ส่วน ประกอบด้วย 1) การสัมภาษณ์เชิงปรากฏการณ์ (Phenomenological Interviews) โดยมีผู้ให้ข้อมูล 31 รายที่ซื้อและเป็นเจ้าของสินค้าแฟชั่นหรูหราทั้งสินค้าปลอมและสินค้าแท้ 2) การวิจัยแบบชาติพันธุ์วรรณาดิจิทัล (Netnography) และ 3) การวิจัยเชิงอัตชาติพันธุ์วรรณนา (Autoethnography) ซึ่งจัดทำขึ้นเพื่อทำความเข้าใจธรรมชาติของตลาดสินค้าฟุ่มเฟือยเลียนแบบในประเทศไทย จากการวิจัยพบว่า ศีลธรรมเชิงอัตวิสัยก่อให้เกิดบรรทัดฐานส่วนบุคคลในเรื่องถูกและผิด ด้วยเหตุนี้จึงชักนำให้ผู้บริโภคได้ประสบการณ์การบริโภคที่แตกต่างกัน รับรู้ความรู้สึกเชิงลบจากความขัดแย้งทางศีลธรรมในแต่ละช่วงเวลา และรับมือกับความรู้สึกดังกล่าวโดยใช้กลยุทธ์การรับมือตามเวลาตลอดเส้นทางการบริโภคสินค้าฟุ่มเฟือยเลียนแบบ (ช่วงก่อนการซื้อ ช่วงขณะซื้อ ช่วงการบริโภค และช่วงหลังการบริโภค) งานวิจัยนี้ช่วยให้ผู้ปฏิบัติงาน ผู้กำหนดนโยบาย และแบรนด์สินค้าฟุ่มเฟือยมีความเข้าใจในการดำเนินการแทรกแซงเชิงกลยุทธ์และการสร้างแบรนด์ว่าควรทำอะไร ทำอย่างไร ทำเมื่อไหร่ และทำกับใคร เพื่อกระตุ้นหรือผลักดันให้ผู้บริโภคสินค้าฟุ่มเฟือยเลียนแบบหันมาบริโภคอย่างมีศีลธรรม

คำสำคัญ: ศีลธรรม ความขัดแย้งทางศีลธรรม กลยุทธ์การรับมือด้านศีลธรรม สินค้าฟุ่มเฟือยเลียนแบบ จิตวิทยาผู้บริโภค

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Introduction

Counterfeit trade has become a global epidemic. The global counterfeit trade ranging from common to luxurious goods is expected to expand to $991 billion by 2022 with Thailand among the top ten counterfeit producers (International Chamber of Commerce, 2017). Luxurious physical products are one of the largest seized counterfeits (Biernat, 2016; OECD/EUIPO, 2019) because successes of luxury brand-names bring about counterfeits to use as substitutes to genuine ones (Jiang & Cova, 2012; Stöttinger & Penz, 2015). Counterfeit luxury consumers are driven by a social-adjustive (i.e. self-presentation) or a value-expressive (i.e. self-expression) motivation to consume counterfeit luxury products (Wilcox et al., 2009). These consumers construct their identities by using symbolic benefits of counterfeit luxury products to project their desired social images (Perez et al., 2010). Past literatures on counterfeit luxury consumption had certain presuppose assumptions about moral nature of those being studied and set specific moral conditions in their researches (Caruana, 2007). It is crucial to adopt the more social notion of morality when the researcher framed and approached current research in order to "facilitates a more sophisticated understanding of consumption morality" (Caruana, 2007) in counterfeit luxury consumption.

Over time, observed negative impacts to the global society and economy are high. At macro level, the violation of intellectual property and related activities directly undermine innovation and economic growth, rob market shares and revenues from legitimate businesses and cause moral and social problems (e.g. child labor, human trafficking, organized crimes). At micro level, parties involved in such trade are exposed to various risks such as legal, moral and risks (social, financial and health) through production, trade and consumption. Even with extensive measures against counterfeiters (e.g. jail times, heavy fines), consumers have not seized their purchases and consumption. These measures only put temporary stops to certain counterfeit activities.

Institutions and luxury brands treat counterfeit luxury consumers as 'victims' rather than 'accomplices' (Chaudhry & Stumpf, 2011). Consumers who are fully aware that products are not genuine can hardly be considered 'victims'. Thus, this research aims to understand 1) how counterfeit luxury consumers give meanings to 'morality' in the context of counterfeit luxury consumption, 2) how these consumers experience their counterfeit luxury consumption throughout their consumption journey, and 3) how these consumers cope with their relative feelings resulted from moral dissonance (i.e. inconsistency between one's moral value and moral behavior). Specifically, current research aims to provide evidence of temporality in consumption journey.

Counterfeit luxury consumers define morality in the context of counterfeit luxury consumption differently. These subjective moralities influence which type of counterfeit luxury products, such as inspired designs and straight knockoffs, is considered morally right and wrong. Subjective classification of rights and wrongs leads to these consumers experiencing their consumption journeys and negative feelings from moral

dissonance differently. Consequently, these consumers cope with relative feelings differently. Thus, it is important to discover 'lived' experiences of counterfeit luxury consumers, particularly repeat buyers. The goal of current research is to equip academic researchers, practitioners, policy makers and brands with understandings on what, when and on who to implement strategic interventions and brand building to nudge these counterfeit luxury consumers towards moral consumption.

Literature Reviews

Different people have different moral acceptance regarding counterfeit luxury products (Stöttinger & Penz, 2015; Wilcox et al., 2009). Morality are "principles or norms that are independent and autonomous from group conventions given the generalizable nature of justice, fairness, and equality" (Rutland et al., 2010) and moral systems are as "interlocking sets of values, practices, institutions, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible (Haidt, 2008)" using the legal system and teaching individuals to respect the rights of others.

Moral values, or 'moral compasses', provide guidelines on how a person should think and behave through inner sense of rights and wrongs. Moral norms based on moral values involve the concept of being a 'good person' (Schwartz, 1968) who is benevolent (Smith et al., 2007) and seeks the well-being of everyone in her life. Morality works differently in different contexts. In black and white contexts, ethical answers (i.e. "thou shalt not kill") are clear and moral violations are perceived as absolute morally wrong and warrant consequential punishments. Nonetheless, morality is not always black and white situations resulting in variation of rights and wrongs. Such ambiguous contexts (i.e. grey situations) involve 'moral flexibility' (i.e. individuals' ability to justify their immoral actions with multiple reasons deeming ethically appropriate (Gino & Ariely, 2012)) is observed. Counterfeit luxury consumption is a grey moral situation as consequences of moral transgressors (i.e. counterfeit luxury consumers) are not directly lethal to moral patients (i.e. luxury brands) allowing these consumers to blur differences between rights and wrongs diminishing threats to their moral selves (Barkan et al., 2015). Various sociological conceptions (e.g. environmental terminology framing behaviors) in consumer research are related to morality (Caruana, 2007) and to moral conditions in the mind of these consumers affecting their individual consumption psychologies and behaviors.

Past literature shows many considerations of moral aspects in counterfeit luxury consumption (moral motivation; Wilcox et al., 2009, cultural orientations as determinants in defining morality; Phau & Teah, 2009), but pays inadequate importance on how counterfeit luxury consumers define counterfeit luxury products and in their perspectives on meaning of morality. Furthermore, Caruana (2007) argues that most ethical consumption researches have framed morality and ethics squarely in terms of individual rational decision-making rather than developed morality from a sociological perspectives. Thus, this leads

the question of "*how counterfeit luxury consumers give meanings to 'morality' in the context of counterfeit luxury consumption*".

Counterfeit Luxury Consumption and Consumer Experience

Counterfeit luxury consumers are individuals who are able to distinguish nondeceptive counterfeit luxury products from deceptive ones in terms of prices, distribution channels and inferior quality, and who are willing to purchase these products (Wilcox et al., 2009) and driven by social factors (e.g. self-expression and/or to fit in; Wilcox et al., 2009, personal psychological factors (e.g. unwillingness to pay high prices; Hoon Ang et al., 2001), integrity, and personal sense of justice seeking; Hennigs et al., 2016), and context-related factors (e.g. luxury value perception; Perez et al., 2010).

There are three consumer segments based on their relationships with authentic brands and counterfeits over time, which are 1) heavy users of counterfeits, 2) users who own less counterfeits than genuine products and 3) users own least amount of counterfeits (Stöttinger & Penz, 2015). All segments start counterfeit luxury journeys with very strong positive emotions towards counterfeits and positive emotions wear off over time. Eventually, these consumers reduce the number of counterfeits to maintain a balanced ratio between genuine and counterfeit products.

At pre-purchase phase, consumers are fueled with excitement, enjoyment and a sense of adventure (Jiang & Cova, 2012). Such positive feelings are heightened by social and physical environment at purchase phase. Some consumers sense these feelings more than others. Immediate social and physical environment have effects on feelings and purchase decisions (Jiang & Cova, 2012). Consumers reportedly feel a sense of adventure, nervousness, enjoyment from "breaking the rules" and mischiefs (Perez et al., 2010). However, consumers start experiencing fear of being caught, uncomfortable feeling and boredom.

At consumption phase, consumers feel a sense of accomplishment and continue feeling positive (Bian et al., 2016; Perez et al., 2010). Nonetheless, consumers' relationships with brands and counterfeit luxury products change as negative feelings, such as fear of being detected using counterfeit luxury products and the feeling of inauthenticity, emerge (Bian et al., 2016; Jiang & Cova, 2012; Perez et al., 2010). Such negative feelings vary from one consumer to another. Eventually, some consumers cease the consumption altogether, while the majority continue using counterfeits at different amounts.

At post-consumption, consumers digest their feelings from previous consumption phases to form attitudes towards counterfeit luxury products and willingness to repeat the consumption. Over time, these consumers reduce counterfeit luxury purchases and consumption to certain thresholds to still reap functional benefits from products (Stöttinger & Penz, 2015). Some consumers stop purchasing and using luxury counterfeits altogether.

Counterfeit Luxury Consumption and Moral Dissonance

Negative feelings along consumption experiences are results of moral dissonance, which when moral behaviors, whether about to be or being committed, conflict with moral norms. Moral dissonance differs from cognitive dissonance as moral dissonance involves breaching criterial of rights and wrongs and poses a larger threat to the self. Moral dissonance can be separated into anticipated and experienced moral dissonance (Barkan et al., 2015). Anticipated moral dissonance arises before individuals committing moral violations while experienced moral dissonance occurs after individuals realize their wrongdoings feeling guilty and remorseful. Both leads individuals to troubling experiences requiring them to compensate for violations and restore senses of morality.

Past literature shows that counterfeit consumers feel bad over the course of counterfeit luxury consumption. However, how consumers experience moral dissonance throughout their consumption journey has not been shown calling for the second research question, "*how these consumers experience their counterfeit luxury consumption and moral dissonance throughout their consumption journey (pre-purchase, purchase, consumption and post-consumption)*".

Coping Strategies

When counterfeit consumers experience moral dissonance from contradictions between their moral and moral behaviors, negative feelings drive them to adjust their behaviors and/or attitudes (Festinger, 1957).

Past literature suggests that individuals cope with negative feelings by *avoiding coping* (i.e. maintaining status quo; Luce, 1998) due to great efforts required, by *changing or stopping behaviors* and by *adopting psychological changes* (Festinger, 1957). For psychological change, coping strategies are separated according to anticipated and experienced moral dissonance. To reduce anticipated moral dissonance, the strategies are shuffling and stretching the truth (i.e. rearranging fact and criteria to include desired morally accepted outcome), self-serving altruism (i.e. turning wrongs into rights with white lies) and *moral licensing* (i.e. allowing oneself to engage in less moral behaviors after prior good deeds). To reduce experienced moral dissonance, strategies are moral cleansing (i.e. committing a more moral action after prior less moral behavior; Brañas-Garza et al., 2013), confession, distancing (i.e. hiding one's moral transgression and pointing to other's moral violations), and moral hypocrisy (i.e. judging one's moral transgression to be less morally objectionable than others' transgressions).

Furthermore, consumers use strategies that alter moral perceptions and attitudes allowing them to continue using counterfeits and that reflect theory of moral reasoning processes (i.e. moral rationalization and decoupling; Chen et al., 2018). Moral rationalization allows individuals to reconstruct their immoral

actions as less immoral to support their actions and reduce judgements of immorality (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). Additionally, denial of responsibility and appealing to higher loyalties are neutralization strategy (Bian et al., 2016). Denial of responsibility is when consumers argue that they are not personally accountable for social norm-violating behavior as it is 'beyond one's control'. Appealing to higher loyalties is when consumers adhere to a higher order motivation (e.g. to save money).

Additionally, moral decoupling lets individuals separate judgments of performance from judgements of morality (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013) allowing moral transgressors to support their actions while recognizing immoral actions. Past literature provides evidence that counterfeit luxury consumers choose to adopt moral decoupling by separating immoral behavior from the performance from counterfeit purchases, such as economic benefits and brand conspicuousness (Chen et al., 2018).

Although past literature suggests coping strategies, interactions between different coping strategies are not yet researched. Specifically, temporal coping, or coping behavior throughout consumption phases, has not yet been explored leading to the third research question, *"how these consumers cope with their relative feelings from moral dissonance."*

Research Methodology

Current study was conducted in Thai counterfeit luxury context and among Thai counterfeit luxury consumers because Thailand has a fascinating counterfeit environment as Thailand is on the top ten counterfeit producers list (Biernat, 2016).

Due to the sensitivity of research topic and the difficulty accessing counterfeit consumers, this research began with netnography (Figure 1) allowing the researcher to see the overall phenomenon and permitting counterfeit consumers to freely interact and express attitudes, opinions, and experiences (Langer & Beckman, 2005) and to find potential informants for phenomenological interviews. While employing netnography and phenomenological interviews, autoethnography was conducted to provide the insider perspective from the researcher's personal experience. Participant-produced materials (e.g. video recordings, written diaries) were used with data from netnography and phenomenological interviews to obtain a more concise presentation of participant experiences, to explore the scope of the study, and to help create the triangulation of data. All methods (Figure 1) were conducted over two years from 2018 to 2020. Total of 7,349 netnographic observations, 56 phenomenological interviews with 31 informants, 6 autoethnographic notes and 66 fieldnotes yielding 1,188 pages were collected and used in data analysis.

	NETNOGRAPHY	PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEWS	AUTOETHNOGRAPHY
DESCRIPTION	• Systematic study of online culture, communities and their members	• Method and technique of interviews based on the phenomenological philosophy (study of the structures of experience and consciousness)	• self-reflective writing which utilizes a researcher's personal experience to extend his/her understanding about a phenomenon
PURPOSE	• to gain the overall understanding of the interested phenomenon through the distant non-participation and participation observations	• to understand the counterfeit phenomenon through the eyes of the counterfeit consumers • to engage with the informants throughout their consumption journey over time	• to provide the insider perspective from the personal experience of the researcher • to extend his/her understanding about a phenomenon through living it

PROCESS	1) Selection Of Online Communities
	  • Allow Public Communication & Participation
	  • > 3 Between-member Discussion Posts
	  • No Posts Older Than 3 Months
	2) Exploration
	  • Non-participant Observation
	  • Familiarization of Overall Online Counterfeit Luxury Consumption Landscape
	3) Planning
	  • Know About Players, Community Norms
	  • Identify the Appropriate Online Communities
	4) Entreé
	  • Participant Observations (i.e. "come out of lurking"; Kozinets, 2002)
	5) Data Collection
	  • Archival Data
	  • Elicited Data (i.e. co-created by the researcher and members)
	  • Fieldnotes
	    • Descriptive Information (i.e. factual data)
	    • Reflective Information (i.e. researcher's thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns)
	6) Data Analysis
	  • Transcribe & Translate Interview Transcripts & Fieldnotes
	  • Attach **Codes** to Phrases
	  • Group Codes into **Categories**
	  • Patterns and **Themes** Emerged from Categories
		1) Recruitment From Netnography And Personal Network
		  • From Any Demographic Background
		  • With Any Level Of Legal Knowledge On Counterfeit Luxury Products
		  • Considered Using Or Already Use Counterfeits For Personal Use
		  • Not For Profit-making Purposes
		2) Snowballing Technique
		3) Phenomenological Interviews (Data Collection)
		  • A list of important topics to cover during the interviews.
		  • First Interviews - to establish an understanding of the consumption domain.
		  • Follow-Up Interviews
		  • Interview Recordings
		    • Voice Recordings
		    • Chat Logs
		  • Participant-Produced Materials
		    • Videos
		    • Voice Recordings
		    • Pictures
		    • Diaries
		4) Data Analysis
		  • Transcribe & Translate Interview Transcripts & Fieldnotes
		  • Attach **Codes** to Phrases
		  • Group Codes into **Categories**
		  • Patterns and **Themes** Emerged from Categories
			1) Initial Engagement
			2) Immersion
			3) Incubation
			4) Illumination
			5) Explication
			6) Creative Synthesis
			7) Data Analysis
			  • Transcribe & Translate Interview Transcripts & Fieldnotes
			  • Attach **Codes** to Phrases
			  • Group Codes into **Categories**
			  • Patterns and **Themes** Emerged from Categories

SOURCES	• Facebook • YouTube • Instagram • Fieldnotes	• Voice Recordings (Face-to-face/Telephone Interviews) • Chat Logs (Messaging/Email Interviews) • Participant-produced Materials • Fieldnotes	• Autoethnographic Notes • Fieldnotes

Figure 1 Summary of Research Methods

In terms of research and data quality checks, current research adopted the triangulation philosophy (Figure 2), which posits that no single method ever adequately solved the problem of competing explanations as each method revealed different aspects of reality. Achieving triangulation could be done by combining different kind of qualitative methods, mixing purposeful samples, and including multiple perspectives (Patton, 1999).
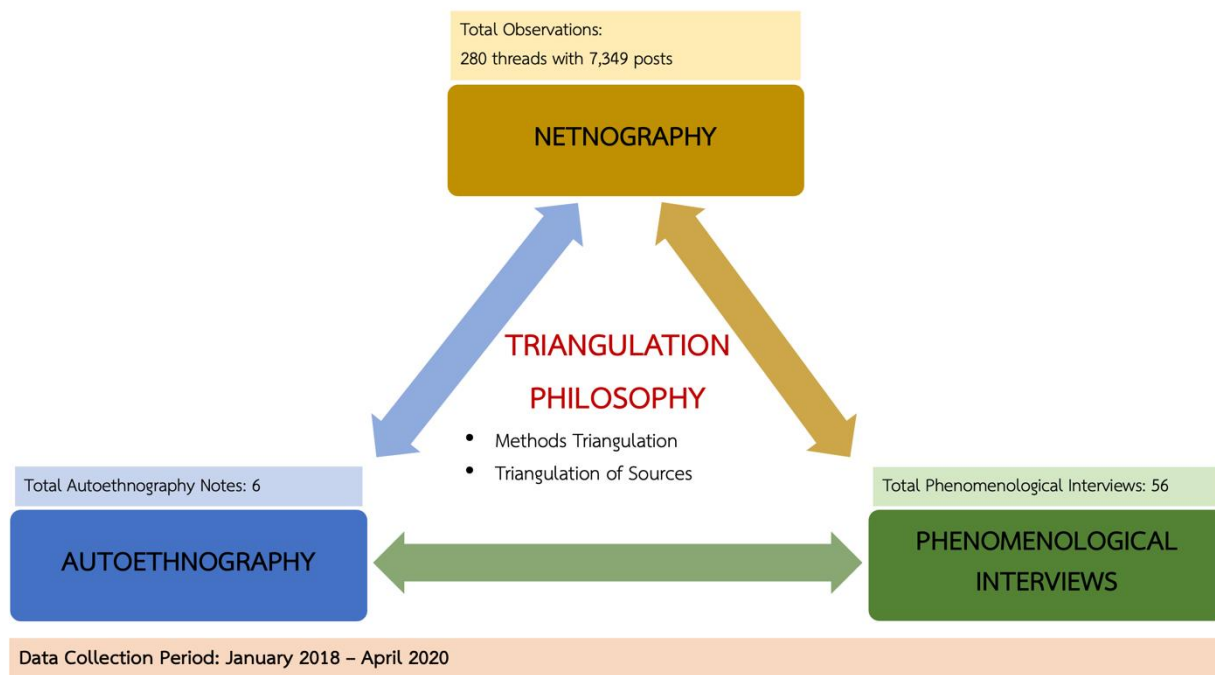
Figure 2 Research Triangulations

There were three research methods (Figure 1) in this research to collect three types of data (i.e. descriptive and reflective fieldnotes and interview data) achieving both *methods triangulation* (i.e. checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods) and *triangulation of sources* (i.e. examining consistency of different data sources within same methods) and ensuring the quality and validity of data and analysis.

All methods are employed and conducted concurrently with each method supporting another. Thus, information extracted from one method facilitate data collection of other methods. For example, definitions of counterfeit luxury products by online community members could be useful in asking informants on their opinions. As data collection process went on, extracted information from all methods directs the researcher's attention and focus.

Netnography

Like ethnography, Netnography (Kozinets, 1998, 2015) allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon through both emic (perspectives of informants) and etic (perspectives of researcher) perspectives permitting the researcher to gain the true understanding from consumer perspectives and to immerse herself into counterfeit luxury consumption as a new counterfeit luxury consumer.

Netnographic process involves (Figure 1) the selection of preferable online communities, exploration, planning, entrée and data collection. The researcher collected archival (i.e. without researcher involvement), elicited (i.e. co-created by researcher and members) and fieldnotes (i.e. researcher's

observational and reflective notes) data with the consideration of research ethics. Fieldnotes were notes created by the researcher during netnography and phenomenological interviews.

To ensure ethics, the researcher followed ethical guidelines (Kozinets, 2002) illustrating that this research was conducted with considerations of honesty, integrity, openness, carefulness, respect, responsibility and objectivity. The researcher always 1) fully disclosed her presence, affiliations, and intentions publicly to online community members during any study, 2) ensured confidentiality and anonymity of informants (i.e. informed consent), 3) incorporated feedbacks from members of the online communities (i.e. permission), and 4) was cautious about the private-versus-public nature of the medium.

The researcher started data analysis and continued using the interpretation of findings to write, present and report the thick description of the phenomenon. The analysis process included coding, categorizing/sorting and thematizing (Figure 1). The analysis is a cyclical iterative act that keeps repeating until nothing new is found. In current research, the researcher was responsible for all data collection, data preparation (i.e. transcription and translation of interview transcripts, fieldnotes and autoethnographic notes) and analysis.

Phenomenological Interviews

Phenomenological interview approach allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of counterfeit consumers as it was 'lived'. (Thompson et al., 1989)" and to engage with informants throughout their consumption journey over time. Thus, informants were recruited at their pre-purchase consideration phases.

31 phenomenological interview informants, who had experiences with different types of counterfeits. These informants were recruited from netnography and those from the researchers' personal network due to the already-established mutual trust. Snowballing technique was utilized to recruit more informants. Informants were informed and guaranteed of their rights, privacy, and data confidentiality as well as the need for follow-up interviews to help the researchers understand how informants' moral perspectives, emotions and behaviors change over time.

Nature of phenomenological approach allowed informants to set pace, style, course and mode (i.e. face-to-face conversation, emailing, telephone calls and/or instant messaging) of interviews. Although there was no strict list of questions and guidelines to dictate the conversations between the researchers and informants ensuring the naturalistic manner of the interviews, the researcher proceeded interviews with a list of important topics to guide the conversations. Data in phenomenological interviews are collected in forms of voice recordings and chat logs (Figure 1). In aiding subsequent phenomenological interviews, informants were asked to provide participant-produced materials on their counterfeit uses in order to generate the questions and discussions in follow-up phenomenological interviews, to allow informants to

become more open to the researcher, and to indicate the level of trust between the researcher and informants.

All interview transcripts were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher using the round-trip translation (i.e. back-and-forth bi-directional translation) between Thai and English guaranteeing the least amount of lived meanings lost. Data analysis and interpretation process were the same as those steps taken in netnography (i.e. coding, categorizing/sorting, thematizing) and was a 'iterative back-and-forth process' of relating a part of a text to the whole (Thompson et al., 1989). Therefore, the interpretation was continuously revised and broadened as the new additional transcripts were obtained. The overall goal was to provide the thematic description of experiences regarding the counterfeit luxury consumption, morality and coping strategies.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is not simply telling a personal experience on cultural experience, but rather a self-reflective writing utilizing a researcher's personal experience to extend her understanding about a phenomenon (Wall, 2006). The researcher looked inward into his/her identity, thoughts, feelings and experiences and outward into his/her relationships, communities and cultures while also looked back and forth (Norman K Denzin, 1997; Holman Jones, 2002). The "inside-out trajectory" of autoethnography began with events that turned the researcher in terms of her thinking, feelings, sense of self and the world (i.e. emic perspectives), and her perspectives on others (outside perspectives) in her social, political and cultural groups.

Fieldnotes were core to the autoethnographic research as they represent social reality of oneself and others. All three data sources were used by the researcher in her autoethnographic writing. By following guidelines in the data collection and by incorporating the steps into writing autoethnographic work, this research tackled the criticism on the lack of systematicity and methodological rigor of autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011; Keller, 1995).

Research Findings

In current research, informants showed changes in both positive and negative feelings throughout their consumption journey. The followings aim to present findings that 1) subjective morality provides counterfeit luxury consumers with malleable moral boundaries leading to 2) the temporality in counterfeit luxury consumption experiences and coping efforts.

Subjective Morality

Subjective morality refers to meanings of morality in the context of counterfeit luxury consumption. However, 'morality' is abstract in nature. Findings on 1) "how do counterfeit luxury consumers define counterfeit luxury products" tell the researcher subjective scope of what is considered rights and wrongs from perspectives of counterfeit luxury consumers allowing the researcher answer 2) "what is the meaning of morality in the context of counterfeit luxury consumption?".

How Do Counterfeit Luxury Consumers Define Counterfeit Luxury Products?

Past literature defines "counterfeit luxury products" as products bearing "a trademark that is identical to, or indistinguishable from, a trademark registered to another party and infringes on the rights of the holder of the trademark" (Bian & Veloutsou, 2017). From data, counterfeit luxury consumers assign the followings thematic characteristics (Figure 3) of counterfeit luxury products.

"Lookalike" refers to products that aesthetically look like authentic ones bearing same logos and designs. Some consumers believe that counterfeits must look exactly like genuine products to be considered as counterfeit luxury products, while others consider the same look with not exactly the same details (e.g. materials used). Thus, 'Lookalike' refers to the common thematic characteristic, which is the aesthetic look that resembles to the authentic product.

"Not sold at genuine boutiques" is another thematic characteristic. "Genuine products are sold in the genuine boutiques." is the common belief on product authenticity. Distribution channels contributes to the sense of authenticity of luxury brands and act as an ambassador (Berghaus et al., 2014).

"Violation of design rights" is another common theme mentioned. Some consumers have in-depth knowledge of patent expiration dates of luxury designs while most do not. Consumers with patent expiration knowledge consider counterfeit produced with expired design patents as "not counterfeits", but those with ongoing patented designs as counterfeits. If counterfeits are produced without luxury brand logos (unbranded) or with different brand logos than originals (inspired products), they are not counterfeits regardless of patent status. Conversely, consumers, who do not have and/or do not care about product design patent knowledge, do not consider inspired products as counterfeits. Data suggest that counterfeit luxury products are "tools to deceive" while inspired products are not because inspired products are produced with designs "inspired by" genuine luxury brands and not with the purpose of being deceitful.
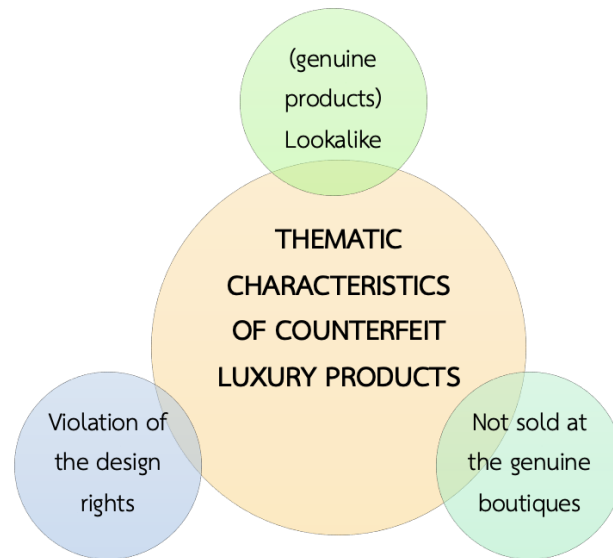
Figure 3 Thematic Characteristics of Counterfeit Luxury Products

Counterfeit luxury products from perspectives of counterfeit luxury consumers are products that look like authentic luxury products bearing same logos and are not sold in the genuine boutiques. Consumers understand that counterfeits violate rights of luxury brands, but degrees of perceived violation differ according to level of legal knowledge on rights violation consumer have. The following products are not considered counterfeit luxury products.

1) Produced using expired patented designs.
2) Inspired by luxury designs and are not branded (*unbranded/non-brand*).
3) Inspired by luxury designs and are branded under different logos/brand names (*inspired*).

Consumers develop their moral definition from what they constitute as counterfeit luxury products (Figure 3) allowing them to develop their own moral criterions on rights and wrongs regarding their counterfeit luxury consumption.

Past literature suggests that consumers perceive luxury to exist on one end of consumer's evaluation of the luxury – counterfeit continuum (figure 4) and counterfeits to be better than non-brand products due to transferable symbolic meanings of authentic brands (Turunen & Laaksonen, 2011).
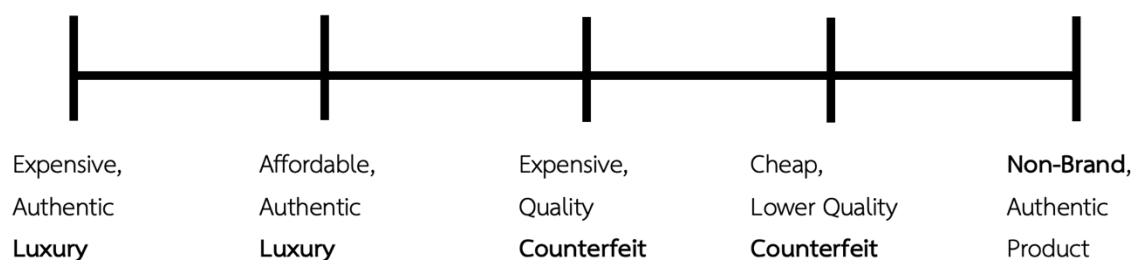
Expensive,	Affordable,	Expensive,	Cheap,	**Non-Brand,**
Authentic	Authentic	Quality	Lower Quality	Authentic
Luxury	**Luxury**	**Counterfeit**	**Counterfeit**	Product

Figure 4 Turunen and Laaksonen's Consumer's Evaluation of the Luxury – Counterfeit Continuum

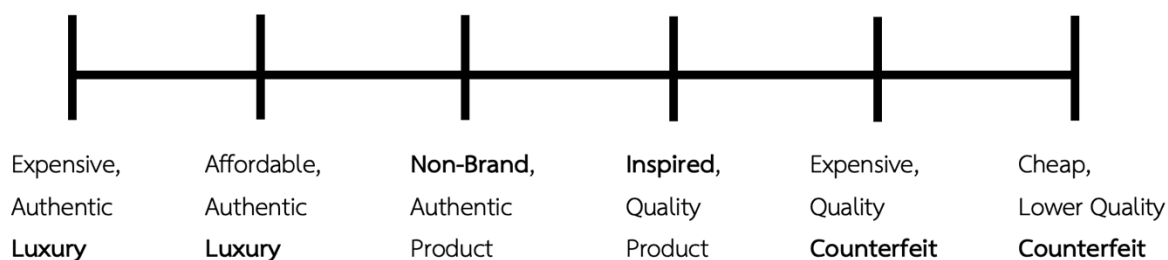| Expensive, | Affordable, | **Non-Brand,** | **Inspired,** | Expensive, | Cheap, |
| Authentic | Authentic | Authentic | Quality | Quality | Lower Quality |
| **Luxury** | **Luxury** | Product | Product | **Counterfeit** | **Counterfeit** |

Figure 5 New Consumer's Evaluation of the Luxury – Counterfeit Continuum

However, data suggest rearrangement and addition of products (figure 5). Counterfeit luxury products with different qualities are perceived as inferior to unbranded/non-brand authentic and inspired products reflecting the consideration of rights violation. Unbranded/non-brand products are seen as authentic in their designs. For inspired brands, consumers enjoy partial luxury attached with designs without worrying about being caught and blamed for using fakes. Thus, unbranded/non-brand and inspired products are placed before both high- and low-quality counterfeits.

What Is the Meaning of Morality in the Context of Counterfeit Luxury Consumption?

Engaging with counterfeits is an *immoral* act from violating rights. Although morality to consumers is tied to legal conditions (i.e. patents), boundary and scope of what are considered as counterfeits are flexible and malleable from one person to another. Combining different cues, consumers decide what to include and leave out from their sense of morality establishing their moral criteria.

Though consumers can identify what are rights and wrongs, they still choose to buy counterfeits according to their definitions (such as those that violate the patents) employing morality in a more flexible way. Unlike past literature that referred to moral flexibility as an ability to justify immoral actions by generating reasons to judge these actions as ethically appropriate (Gino & Ariely, 2012), these consumers accept their immoral acts.

Notably, findings revealed an interesting finding that subjective morality changes over time as these consumers go through their counterfeit luxury journey using their experiences from prior consumption and previous phases to update their morality meanings.

Temporality in The Counterfeit Luxury Consumption Experiences and Coping Efforts

At **pre-purchase phase**, consumers look for counterfeits by searching online or consulting with counterfeit luxury veterans (i.e. long time users). Consumers who purchase without much searching or planning reported watching live sessions on social networking sites (SNSs), namely Facebook and Instagram, as consumers instantly get information on products and shops and connect with sellers. SNSs are highly important. PwC (2016) report that 51% of Thai online consumers purchase directly via SNSs comparing to much lower figures of 16% worldwide and 30% of Asian online shoppers.

Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) explain that the real-time nature of SNSs' live streaming services provides consumers with more useful, playful, meaningful and personal shopping experiences than those of conventional shopping. Online shopping, a social act, can increase consumer trust and engagement when the perceived similarity between customers, sellers and/or other customers is present.

Data show that consumers feel excited, fun, adventurous, humorous, curious and surprised (Figure 6) from watching live streaming, wanting to find the best counterfeits, exploring the wide selection of products and to see that there are counterfeits with less popular designs of genuine products. No negative feelings were reported as moral dissonance was not triggered (Figure 7). Hence, there is no need for coping strategies.
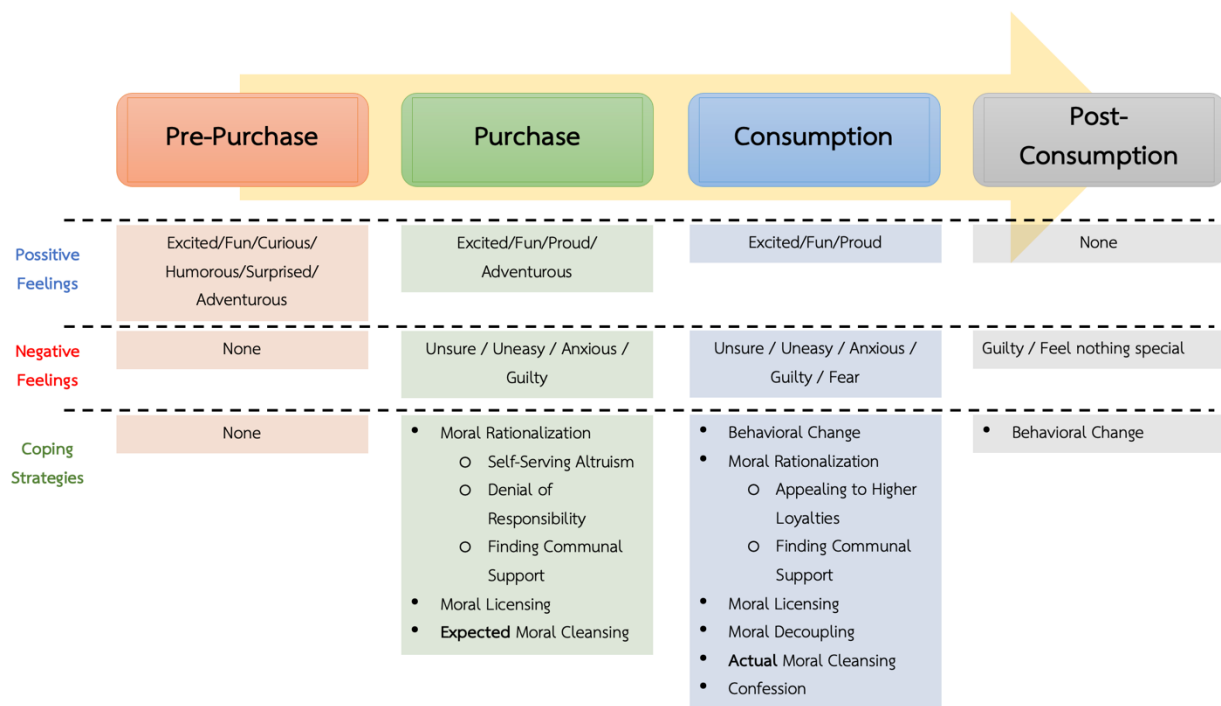

Figure 6 Summary of Feelings During Counterfeit Luxury Consumption Journey

Consumers enter **purchase phase** by having to make decision to buy and engage in counterfeit trade. Contrary to the popular belief (Bian et al., 2016; Perez et al., 2010), counterfeit luxury trade is no longer a secret, operates like legitimate business and takes place in physical and/or on online stores. Consumers find sellers through the introduction of counterfeit luxury veterans and/or by chance.

Counterfeit sellers give high importance to customer relationships hoping for repeated returns and delight their customers by making them feel welcomed, by offering after sales (e.g. hardware repairs) and preorder services, and by informing customers that their counterfeits are guaranteed and produced with high-quality materials. Seemingly sincere interactions between sellers and consumers make the trades feel less risky. Customer dissatisfaction, bad experiences with the genuine boutiques and similarity between counterfeit sellers and customers influence consumers in purchase decisions.

Additionally, availability of second-hand resale platform for customers lowers their perceived risks related to counterfeit purchases. Customers can sell their counterfeits back to or consign with sellers. Findings suggest there are two counterfeit luxury customer segments; 1) high-end/1:1 grade customers purchasing counterfeits that look like genuine and 2) other grade customers with limited shopping budgets buying lower grade and second-hand counterfeits from the resale platform.

Interestingly, counterfeit luxury products are seen as sources of inauthenticity (Gino et al., 2010). However, authenticity is subjective to consumers' experiences and shown to relate to one's identity (Leigh et al., 2006). Authenticity defines what is and is not part of the community as well as positions individuals within the social boundaries. Thus, these consumers aim to look as authentic as possible to their reference groups paying close attention to all little details of counterfeits and comparing them to the authentic ones.

> *Informant 3: When I search for the fakes, I find out first what the real ones are like in the boutiques. I find out what colors the brand offers and what kind of materials will the products be produced with. All the details of the products.*

As Leigh et al. (2006) posits, "the more authentic a presentation, the more it is real" to both users and those who perceive them. However, only counterfeit luxury veterans can tell whether products they see are genuine or counterfeited. Counterfeits can be seen as authentic and "real" if the qualities perceived by individuals match those of genuine products based on their past experiences.

Consumers continue feeling excited, fun, proud and adventurous (Figure 6). Although the products are inauthentic, purchase experiences can be authentic. Experience's degree of originality determines interpretation of authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006). Thus, informants reported that engaging in purchases of counterfeit luxury products gave them new and different experiences providing them with senses of authenticity in their experiences and with positive feelings.

	PRE-PURCHASE	PURCHASE	CONSUMPTION	POST-CONSUMPTION
Trigger	None	• Anticipated reference group members' reaction if the users are caught using counterfeits • Social cues • Inner beliefs • Feeling bad vibes from physical environment • Having to be careful when purchasing	• Anticipated reference group members' reaction • Feedbacks from reference groups (Verbal & Non-Verbal) • Social cues • Inner beliefs	• Inner beliefs
Types of Moral Dissonance	None	• Anticipated Moral Dissonance • Experienced Moral Dissonance	• Anticipated Moral Dissonance • Experienced Moral Dissonance	• Experienced Moral Dissonance

Figure 7 Triggers and Moral Dissonance Throughout Counterfeit Consumption Journey

However, informants reported negative feelings (i.e. doubtful, unsure, uneasy, anxious and guilty; Figure 6). These are evidence for anticipated moral dissonance triggered by environmental factors, social cues and inner values (Figure 7). Environmental factors (i.e. shop locations, aesthetic appearance and neighborhood surroundings) trigger experienced moral dissonance and adversely affect the consumers with anxiety and distrust. Consumers question if they need these counterfeits or if they are ready to use them and anticipate if reference group members see them purchasing counterfeits.

To resolve negative feelings, consumers adopt behavioral and/or psychological strategies (Figure 6). Data suggest that, at purchase phase, consumers adopt psychological strategies; 1) self-serving altruism, 2) denial of responsibility, 3) finding communal support, 4) moral licensing and 5) expected moral cleansing. Firstly, *self-serving altruism* strategy helps consumers rationalize their behavior through their prosocial support of small local brands selling inspired products. Secondly, d*enial of responsibility* (i.e. when consumers argue that they are not accountable for violating moral norms) allows consumers to psychologically better negative effects on their self-image of engaging in immoral behaviors. Thirdly, *finding communal support* helps consumers cope by gaining moral validation and approval from people in their lives that their actions are socially and morally acceptable (Bandura, 2014). Fourthly, moral licensing allows consumers to do immoral deeds because they have already done prior moral deeds. For example, woman A purchased an authentic Gucci bag (prior good deed) feel "licensed" to purchase counterfeit Gucci sneakers (less moral behavior). Consumers rationalized that they already purchase authentic ones, which is doing right by luxury brands and designers, they are allowed to purchase exact replicas. However, if the counterfeit luxury product is the first product purchased, then moral licensing does not help consumers to cope with moral dissonance as "fakeness" is transferred from the first counterfeit to the second authentic product. Lastly but most interesting, "*expected*" moral cleansing is a promise made to self that she will

later buy authentic products after counterfeit purchase and consumption, "If it suits me, I'll buy the real one." Expected moral cleansing pushes moral burdens to the future as sometimes current coping effort with negative feelings is too great.

BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES	PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

• **USE LESS** of or **STOP** using counterfeit luxury products
• **STRATEGIC USE** of counterfeit luxury products in certain situations and/or with certain groups of people only
	• **MORAL RATIONALIZATION**
	  • Self-Altruism
	  • Neutralization Strategies
	    • Denial of Responsibility
	    • Appeal to Higher Loyalties
	  • Finding Communal Support
	• **MORAL LICENSING**
	• **MORAL DECOUPLING**
	  • Meaning Creation
	  • Humanization of Counterfeit Luxury Products
	• **MORAL CLEANSING**
	• **CONFESSION**

Figure 8 Types of Coping Strategies Related to Counterfeit Luxury Consumption

At **consumption phase**, consumers use their counterfeit luxury and genuine products concurrently. Data suggest that there are more consumers who use both counterfeits and genuine products than those who only use real or fake products. Consumers use their counterfeits in various situations receiving verbal and non-verbal feedbacks from their reference groups.

Informants reported continuing to feel excited, fun and proud (Figure 6) from being a part of the secret society, from being smart consumers, and from being able to preserve pristine conditions of their genuine products. Counterfeit luxury products are tools to bring provide these consumers with interpersonal relationships with reference groups (e.g. I use what you use so I belong your circle) giving these individuals the sense of interpersonal authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006). Counterfeit luxury products are also tools for counterfeit luxury consumers to construct their identities (Chand & Fei, 2021; Turunen & Laaksonen, 2011; Perez et al., 2010) allowing them to achieve intrapersonal authenticity, which is unique from one person to another. Senses of authenticity positively affect the consumption experience.

Situational factors (i.e. brand-name expertise of reference group members and characteristics of reference groups) and inner beliefs influence how consumers feel towards their counterfeit luxury products. These factors trigger both anticipated and experience moral dissonance causing consumers to feel negative feelings (Figure 6). Consumers continue to doubt themselves, to feel unsure, uneasy, anxious and guilty and to fear being caught using fakes. Data suggest that most of these consumers cope with their negative feelings and adjust their proportion of their consumption between genuine and counterfeit luxury products

to the level that they feel comfortable. Increasing negative feelings are evidence of inability to resolve moral dissonance occurred in the previous phase.

Consumers adopt behavioral change and psychological strategies to cope with their negative feelings. Behavioral change is straightforward which are 1) using less of or stop using counterfeit luxury products and 2) strategically using counterfeit luxury products in certain situations and/or with certain groups of people only in order to maintain their "good person" image and social status.

At consumption phase, some consumers continue to use 3) finding communal support and 4) moral licensing and are satisfied. In addition, expected moral cleansing at purchase phase pushes the coping effort to the current phase. Data suggest these consumers adopt 5) actual moral cleansing, 6) appealing to higher loyalties or 7) moral decoupling to cope. If consumers follow through with their self-promises to purchase genuine versions of their counterfeits, then these consumers commit relatively more moral actions after prior less moral behavior. This action is referred in this research as "*actual*" moral cleansing.

However, if consumers do not follow through with their self-promises to moral cleanse, they either appeal to higher loyalties or adopt moral decoupling. Appealing to higher loyalties allow these consumers to psychologically lessen negative impacts on their self-image of using counterfeit luxury products. Data suggest that these consumers use the concept of "a righteous financial path" (i.e. saving money and financial freedom). Moral decoupling lets individuals to separate judgments of performance from judgements of morality (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013) allowing moral transgressors to support their actions while still recognizing that the actions are immoral or unethical. Data suggest that there are two strategies (i.e. 7.1) meaning creation and 7.2) humanization of counterfeit luxury products) that can be classified under moral decoupling strategy (Figure 8). Firstly, consumers separate judgements of performance and of morality from one another by creating meaning for counterfeit luxury products in order to become emotionally attached to counterfeits and are willing to compartmentalize immoral acts from product performances. Secondly, consumers humanize counterfeit luxury products in order to attribute human qualities to these inanimate entities and can lead to emotional attachments. With emotional attachment, these consumers are more willing to separate judgments of morality from product performance.

Last psychological strategy consumers adopt is confession. By admitting right out that their products are counterfeits, these consumers feel that they own up to their immoral behaviors and feel less negatively towards themselves. They reported that they can have a new clean start with those who they make the confessions to.

Although most of consumers could resolve their negative feelings at purchase and consumption phases, some consumers could not. Those who have strong inner beliefs were shown to continue experiencing the negative and supposedly 'neutral' feelings (Figure 6) in **post-consumption phase**. These consumers specially feel that luxury product designs are more than just designs but rather art pieces. Using

counterfeit luxury products is an insult to luxury designers, who hold the patent rights to these designs. This inner belief triggered experience moral dissonance (Figure 7) calling for coping actions. Although "not feeling anything special" supposedly seem neutral, it has a hidden meaning. These consumers reported perceiving counterfeits are doppelgangers with less quality and feel that there is nothing special about counterfeit luxury products. Data suggest that these consumers cope with negative feelings by using less of or stop using their counterfeits.

Data show that consumers go through different moral dissonance at different consumption phases. Thus, it is important to understand that the initial adoption of coping strategies might solve negative feeling at that time but might not work in the later consumption phases as individuals constantly receive cues and feedbacks that can trigger moral dissonance again. For example, woman #11 and her unbranded Hermès Lindy bag. She strolled at a high-end flea market at one of the biggest shopping malls in Bangkok and found these high-quality unbranded Hermès Kelly bags, which she purchased a few at around 3,000 to 5,000 Thai Baht each. She dealt with rising negative feelings by adopting expected moral cleansing, which is promising to moral cleanse after purchase and consumption, at purchase phase, "*If it suits me, I'll buy the real one.*". This coping strategy did not work at consumption phase as she received more non-verbal feedbacks (i.e. observation of her boss's authentic Hermès Kelly bag) and formed a new perspective towards both counterfeit and authentic products. She then later adopted the appealing to higher cause (i.e. wise with her money) strategy to cope with her negative feelings from moral dissonance and eventually she stopped using purchased counterfeit products altogether.

Thus, this provides the evidence of interactions between different coping strategies over consumption journey and over time, which current research terms as 'temporal coping strategies' (i.e. coping effort over different consumption phases from pre-purchase to post-consumption phases).

Discussions

Theoretical Contributions

Current research contributes to the body of existing research in many ways. Firstly, this study has shed the light on the importance of consumer perspectives on consumer research by examining how subjective definition of counterfeit luxury products from perspectives of counterfeit luxury consumers creates subjective and malleable boundaries of what is considered moral and immoral.

Secondly, current research put the spotlight on temporality in consumption journey by showing that (1) during counterfeit luxury consumption experience, moral dissonance is triggered at different phases for different individuals, and thus, negative feelings are felt differently at different phases, and that (2) there are interactions between coping strategies by examining relationships between each coping strategies

throughout counterfeit luxury consumption journeys. Particularly, the study shows that one coping strategy may not solve moral dissonance in long-term but may lead to these consumers to later adopt other coping strategies to rid of moral dissonance.

Practical Implications

Current research provides insights into how counterfeit luxury consumers, who are also luxury buyers, think, feel and behave regarding the concurrent consumption of both genuine and counterfeit luxury products. For practitioners and policy makers, educational programs regarding severity of rights violation and what constitute rights violation should be implemented to align consumers' moral norms with practitioners' desired moral norms. Consumers must understand that engaging with counterfeit luxury consumption in any form is immoral. Luxury brands must distinguish themselves from counterfeit sellers by emphasizing that authentic product uniqueness and consumer relationship building through storytelling of the history, service personnel involved in the whole process, and loyal customers.

Research Limitations

Current research has three main limitations, which are 1) age, culture and income of Thais aged between 25- and 73-years earning income between 15,000 and more than 95,000 Thai Baht influence different viewpoints and counterfeit luxury experiences, 2) bilingual research (i.e. Thai and English) could post a limitation in terms of the loss of meaning during the process, and 3) biases, such as selective memory and social desirability, from participant-produced materials. Future research should focus on consumer groups and how each group copes with their negative feelings from moral dissonance throughout their counterfeit luxury consumption journeys.

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