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The consumer behavior in the context of counterfeit products: A bibliometric analysis

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the main areas of works devoted to the topic of counterfeit goods/brands consumption and to present the dynamics of changes in researchers' interest in this subject. The research method used in the article was bibliometric analysis, complemented by content analysis of literature selected from the Scopus database. Research results: The main areas of research on the issue of counterfeit product consumption focused on 1) online consumer behavior and ethical aspects, 2) consumption of counterfeit products and brands, and 3) social aspects of consumption of counterfeit products. The earliest publications focus on purchasing behavior in the context of buying counterfeit products, followed by researchers who have focused on the ethical aspects of consuming counterfeit goods. More recent studies focus on the consumption and trade of counterfeit goods on the Internet. Conclusions: The ever-expanding global trade in counterfeit products poses a major challenge — it erodes business revenue, undermines innovation, and hampers economic growth. To effectively mitigate these phenomena, it is essential to have up-to-date knowledge of the latest scientific advances in the field. Research into the buyer behavior in the context of counterfeit goods can provide useful information for manufacturers about the scale of the problem and the possible need for remedial action.

1. Introduction

Companies with well-known brands and recognizable products are exposed to the threat of counterfeiting their goods. A company's or brand's reputation, as one of its most valuable assets, is built up over the years and needs to be actively protected against unfair competitive practices. In the face of globalization and trade liberalization, infringement of intellectual property rights is becoming increasingly common. Unauthorized trade in branded products reduces business revenues, undermines innovation, hampers economic growth and can even pose a danger to consumers themselves (EUIPO, 2020). Counterfeit goods often do not meet quality standards and may contain harmful substances or defective components. In addition, purchasers are often unaware that they are in possession of counterfeit products and this ultimately damages the reputation of the manufacturer of the original goods.

According to a report by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), losses caused by the presence of counterfeit goods in the European Union amount to as much as PLN 63.8 billion annually (EUIPO, 2020). They are the result of reduced revenue from direct and indirect taxes and social security contributions, which are unpaid by dishonest producers. The range of goods affected by counterfeiting is wide and includes common consumer goods (food, toys, cosmetics), business products (electronic machinery, optical and medical equipment) and luxury products (watches, perfumes, jewelry) (OECD-EUIPO, 2019, 47).

Although the range of counterfeit goods covers virtually all product categories, the fraudsters' targets are most often products from well-known (widely recognized) global brands. It should be noted that the online environment is characterized by the ease of copying the work of others and the generally high anonymity of users, therefore buyers face difficulties in assessing the authenticity of products. In order to effectively counter the above mentioned phenomena, it is necessary to have up-to-date knowledge of why consumers decide to purchase counterfeit goods (learning about purchase motivations). In addition, identifying and fully understanding key developments and being aware of the latest trends in this issue can help researchers design better future research. For the companies, on the other hand, learning about the motives for buying counterfeit goods allows them to better monitor the market and competition, and identify and better respond to potential threats. It should be added that knowing why some people consciously (or not) choose counterfeit products enables companies to better protect their brand reputation and good corporate image, and take initiatives to educate consumers about the socioeconomic harms of such practices.

The aim of this article is to identify the main areas of works devoted to the topic of counterfeit goods/brands consumption and to present the dynamics of changes in researchers' interest in this subject. This article is structured as fol-

lows. First, we discuss the methodology and procedure for conducting the study using the VOSviewer software. Secondly, we present the results of the study, describing and discussing the focus of the research areas dedicated to counterfeit purchasing. Finally, in the conclusions section, we present the main findings and limitations of the study.

2. Research methodology

To achieve the objectives outlined above, we used a research method of bibliometric analysis, complemented by a content analysis of the literature. These methods are commonly used in works dedicated to examining the current state of research in a wide variety of research areas, including but not limited to the issues of prosumption (Shah et al., 2020), corporate social responsibility (Ejdys, 2016), or marketing communication (Rocha et al., 2020). The bibliometric analysis process adapted the different steps previously proposed by Ejdys (2016) and Karakose et al. (2021). To carry out the bibliometric analysis, we followed the three-step procedure outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. The research process used in this article

Stage 1 Search and identification	Selection of the core literature from the Scopus database. Records identified through Scopus database ($N = 79$).
Stage 2 Data export	From the 79 records obtained, full Scopus database data were exported, including: citation information, bibliographical information, abstracts, and keywords.
Stage 3 Bibliometric analysis	A bibliometric analysis supplemented by a content analysis of the literature was carried out.

Source: own study.

2.1. Stage 1: Search and identification

This stage involved selecting a core list of academic articles that address the consumption of counterfeit goods included in the Scopus database. We chose the Scopus database because it is considered the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature (Dias et al., 2019). This database contains more than 60 million records and includes more than 21,500 peer-reviewed journals and more than 5,000 publishers in various scientific fields (Dias et al., 2019). Moreover, as Mongeon and Paul-Hus (2016) point out, the coverage of journals included in the Web of Science (WoS) in the social sciences, arts and humanities is relatively low. Noteworthy, the research concerns articles investigating buyers' conscious and unconscious behavior towards counterfeit products. In addition, the research applies

to all types of counterfeit goods and is not limited to a specific mode of purchase (online/off-line). We used keywords related to the consumption of counterfeit products and brands, taking care also to include word variations in English (British and American). The query and keywords used are presented in Box 1.

Box 1. Search string

TITLE-ABS-KEY (“counterfeit products” OR “counterfeit brands” OR “counterfeit goods” OR “fake goods” OR “fake brands” OR “fake products” OR “imitation merchandise” OR “knockoff items” OR “pirated goods” OR “counterfeit merchandise” OR “unauthentic items” OR “counterfeit consumer goods” AND (“customer behavior” OR “consumer behaviour” OR “buyer behavior” OR “buyer behaviour” OR “purchasing patterns” OR “shopping habits” OR “customer decision-making” OR “consumer choices” OR “purchase motives” OR “buying factors” OR “purchase drivers” OR “shopping motivations” OR “consumer attitudes” OR “consumer attitude” OR “customer perceptions”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , “ar”) OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , “cp”) OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , “re”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , “English”))

Source: own study.

The above keywords were used to search for titles, abstracts, and keywords (searches were conducted in June 2023). Only records covering documents published in scientific journals, conference proceedings or reviews were analyzed (we excluded book chapters). In addition, we limited the search to documents written in English only, did not specify a time frame for publication and did not apply limits to the subject areas that the Scopus database classifies articles. The search process conducted in this way led to finding 79 papers on the issue of the consumption of counterfeit goods.

2.2. Stage 2: Data export

From the 79 records found in the Scopus database, we exported the full bibliometric data including: citation information, bibliographical information, abstract and keywords, funding details, and other information to a summary file in CSV format.

2.3. Stage 3: Bibliometric analysis

We subjected the exported data from the Scopus database to bibliometric and content analysis. As part of this step, we conducted a time series analysis to present the number of publications in the Scopus database over different time periods. In addition, we identified the scientific journals that published the most papers on the consumption of counterfeit products. In the next step, we conducted a co-occurrence analysis of keywords — for this purpose, keyword association intensity maps were produced using VOSviewer version 1.6.19 for all 79 publications extracted from the Scopus database. VOSviewer is a software for constructing and

visualizing bibliometric networks based on data from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science or PubMed (VOSviewer, 2023). It is widely used by researchers for mapping research areas (Ejdys, 2016; Jun et al., 2018; Zema and Sulich, 2022).

The process of generating the maps using the VOSviewer software involved three steps: 1) extracting keywords that occurred at least 3 times in bibliometric descriptions. Of the initial 447 keywords, 36 were identified that met this requirement; 2) removal of keywords that only referred to the research methodology used, e.g. ‘questionnaire’, or generic words such as “article” or “marketing.” This resulted in a final total number of 32 keywords; 3) generating a map showing the intensity of the links between the identified 32 keywords (see Table 3) among all 79 publications extracted from the Scopus database. A content analysis of the literature was also conducted to identify and discuss consumer motivations for purchasing counterfeit goods.

3. Results and discussion

The first stage of the bibliometric analysis was a time series analysis, which shows the number of published papers on the consumption of counterfeit products by year deposited in the Scopus database (see Figure 1).

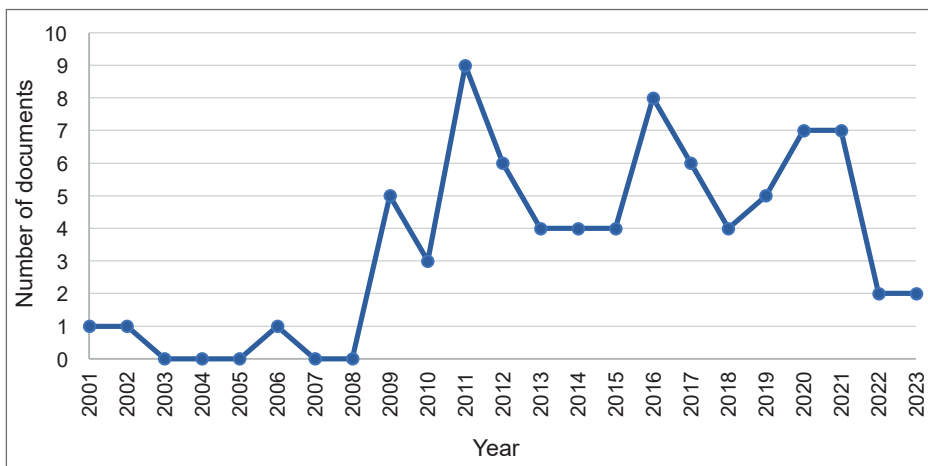


Figure 1. Number of publications on the issue of counterfeit product consumption in the Scopus database

Source: own study based on the Scopus database.

As presented in Figure 1, the greatest interest in the topic of consumer buying behavior towards counterfeit products was between 2010 and 2021. Although we did not specify a publication timeframe in the Scopus database literature review

criteria, the first paper on this topic was published in 2001 under the title “Spot the difference: consumer responses towards counterfeits” (Ang et al., 2001). In the aforementioned paper, the authors conducted a study of consumers’ motivations for buying counterfeit and pirated works. The main finding was that consumers who bought counterfeit music CDs perceived such practices as less risky, trusted the shops offering such products more and did not perceive them as a bad practice. We also conducted an analysis taking into account the possibility of categorizing articles according to keywords using the filters available in the Scopus database. Most articles related to consumer motives for buying counterfeit products analyze attitudes or purchase intentions (Bupalan et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Souiden et al., 2018).

After completing the time series analysis, we carried out an identification of the journals in which the largest number of papers on consumer aspects of buying counterfeit products were published. Table 2 shows the list of the top ten journals in which the largest number of papers on the analyzed topic are located.

Table 2. Number of publications on the issue of counterfeit consumption in the Scopus database

No.	Journal	Publications	SJR*
1	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics</i>	3	0.994
2	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	3	2.590
3	<i>Journal of Global Fashion Marketing</i>	3	0.858
4	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	2	1.630
5	<i>Industria Textila</i>	2	0.254
6	<i>International Journal of Supply Chain Management</i>	2	0.190
7	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	2	1.090
8	<i>Journal of Consumer Marketing</i>	2	0.845
9	<i>Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management</i>	2	1.271
10	<i>Journal of Pharmaceutical Health Services Research</i>	2	0.234

* SJR — SCImago Journal Rank

Source: own study.

By examining Table 2, several noteworthy observations can be made. Firstly, no specific journal stands out as a predominant publisher of papers on the subject of counterfeit product consumption. In simpler terms, there isn’t a single leading journal that clearly takes the lead in publishing scientific papers on this topic. Secondly, there is a significant dispersion of publications across various journals, some of which may even cover unrelated themes. This phenomenon could be attributed to the complexity of the issue surrounding counterfeit product consumption, as

it encompasses diverse aspects ranging from consumer psychology to ethics and brand management.

With the above in mind, researchers focus on different aspects of this topic and publish their work in journals with a variety of topics (including specialized journals). Hence, on the top 10 list, there are trade journals — focused on the sectors most affected by aspects of IPR infringement through counterfeiting, e.g., *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing* and *Industria Textila* (clothing) or *International Journal of Supply Chain Management* (supply chain).

The next step was to identify the focus areas of the work dedicated to the topic of counterfeit goods/brands consumption. To this end, we developed a map of the intensity of the links between the 32 keywords identified (see Figure 2). The allocation of a keyword to a cluster is done by analyzing the co-occurrences of words in the text and their importance. VOSviewer constructs maps based on a co-occurrence matrix — these techniques have been described in more detail in earlier studies (e.g., Van Eck and Waltman, 2010).



Figure 2. Intensity map of the links between keywords retrieved from the Scopus database
Source: own study.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the research on the issue of counterfeit consumption is concentrated in three areas, which were identified and organized by the VOSviewer software. The larger the circles shown in the figure above, the more frequent the keywords in question are among the 79 publications included in the Scopus database. Furthermore, the closer together the keywords are placed, the more often they appear together. In Table 3, we present a detailed set of keywords that are divided into clusters. This table complements Figure 2.

Table 3. Keywords grouped into clusters shown in Figure 2

Cluster	Color	Research area	Keywords
1	Red	Online consumer behavior and shopping ethics	attitude; consumer attitudes; consumer behavior; consumer ethics; consumption behavior; counterfeit, crime; electronic commerce; ethics; internet; morality; purchasing; sales.
2	Green	Consumption of counterfeit products and fashion brands	consumer behavior; counterfeit goods; counterfeit; products; counterfeiting; counterfeits; fashion; luxury brands; Malaysia; piracy; purchase intention.
3	Blue	The social aspects of consuming counterfeit products	adult; commerce; commercial phenomena; consumer attitude; counterfeit drug; female; human; humans; male.

Source: own study.

As we have presented in Table 3, we named the first research area “Online consumer behavior and shopping ethics.” It addresses the purchase of counterfeit goods online, the factors that drive the buyer to such practices and, ultimately, the marketing implications of this phenomenon. Research by Mróz (2016) suggests that Polish consumers use pirated content, counterfeit products, and services mainly for financial reasons (high prices of the original goods, low income) and usually involve unauthorized use of music and films. In contrast, the researchers Islam et al., (2021) found that materialism and consumer novelty-seeking have a significant positive impact on the internet use and attitudes towards buying counterfeit products. This area of research also touches on the ethical aspects of buying counterfeit products. An interesting finding is provided in a study by Souiden et al. (2018), which found that ethics and religiosity influence the consumption of counterfeit goods.

The second research area has focused on the topic of consumption of counterfeit fashion products and brands. In this area, research has focused on the analysis of personality factors in the purchase of brands (Ting et al., 2016), some studies analyze consumer purchasing behavior for specific product categories such as clothing (Mayasari et al., 2022), luxury goods (Wang et al., 2023), or sunglasses (Singh et al., 2022).

The third research area covers the social and psychological aspects of counterfeit product consumption. In this research, the authors argue that the propensity to consume counterfeit products “is informed by differences in psychological states of social power and on levels of product conspicuousness (readily displayed vs. more privately consumed)” (Bian et al., 2015, 37–38). In other words, luxury brands, by exuding the visibility of their products, e.g. through a prominent logo, make the people surrounding the consumer see the product they own and thus form an evaluation of it. An interesting finding is provided by a study conducted by Gültekin (2018), in which it is the love of money that positively influences the intention to purchase counterfeit products.

In order to recognize the latest trends, we have created a map (see Figure 3), which is a useful tool for analyzing the most recent trends in research on the consumption of counterfeit products. This map allows us to classify research publications using a time scale (Shvindina, 2019).

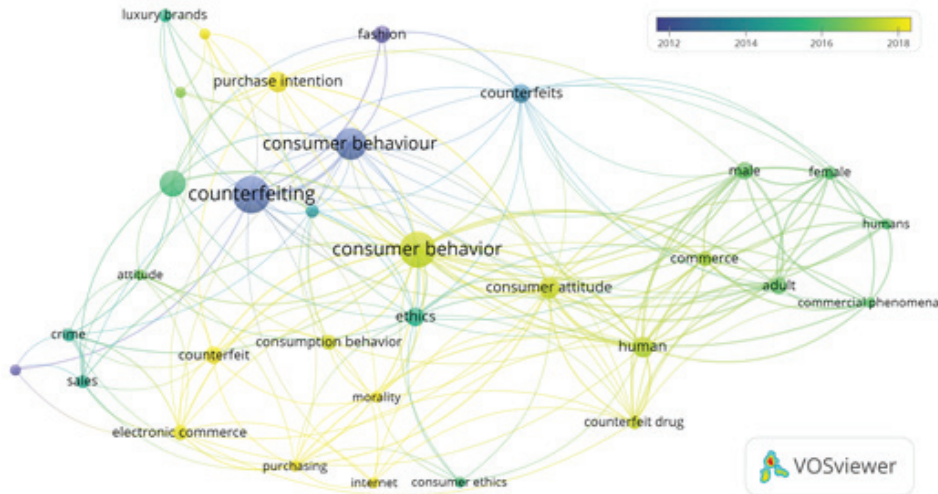


Figure 3. Keyword link intensity map with overlay visualization

Source: own study.

In the presented Figure 3, it can be seen that the different keywords are marked with a specific color, which depends on the year of publication. The oldest publications (marked in purple) focus on the purchasing behavior of buyers in the context of buying counterfeit products — especially in the fashion industry. The researchers' interest in the issue of counterfeiting in the fashion industry is not surprising, as this sector is particularly vulnerable to unfair trade practices and the trade in counterfeit fashion goods is a global problem (Certilogo, 2022). Subsequently, researchers have focused on the ethical aspects of the consumption of counterfeit goods, hence keywords such as “ethics,” “consumer ethics,” “crime” and “attitude” have been included in this area and part of the research analyses the social aspects of the consumption of counterfeit products “commercial phenomena,” “humans,” “adults.” More recent studies, on the other hand, focus on the consumption and trade of counterfeit goods online “internet,” “purchasing,” “electronic commerce,” “purchase intention,” “counterfeit,” “consumption behavior.” This is an important thread in the discussion, as consumers, having gained the ability to purchase products with virtually no territorial restrictions via global online platforms, are also exposed to unfair sales practices. The issue of trade in counterfeit drugs has also been raised recently. Recent publications in this area have focused on investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the circulation of counterfeit medicines and medical supplies (Hamdan, 2022).

4. Conclusions

As the world becomes more global and trade more liberal, violations of intellectual property rights are becoming more common. The illegal sale of well-known brands products erodes companies' revenues, stifles innovation, hampers economic growth and even poses a threat to consumers themselves. Counterfeit goods often do not meet quality standards and may contain harmful substances or defective components. What is more, the buyer is often unaware that he or she is purchasing counterfeit goods, which ultimately leads to damaging the reputation of the original product manufacturers. In order to counteract these phenomena, it is necessary to understand current state of knowledge, to identify and understand the most important research developments in the subject matter analyzed in this article. Furthermore, an awareness of the latest research trends may allow other researchers to plan their research projects more accurately. The key findings should be stated in context.

Firstly, most articles focused on consumer motives for buying counterfeit products analyze attitudes or purchase intentions. The stronger a buyer's purchase intention (e.g., towards counterfeit goods), the more likely the buyer is to make a purchase (actual behavior) and this claim is reflected in research results (Pavlou, 2003). Furthermore, purchase intentions are correlated with actual behavior (Morwitz, 2014). The interest of researchers also in attitudes towards the consumption of counterfeit goods is all the more unsurprising, as purchase intention (so important in the purchasing process) does not develop in isolation — it is a consequence of preceding events (including attitude formation).

Secondly, we observe a significant fragmentation of publications regarding the consumption of counterfeit goods, which are scattered across various (often thematically distant) journals. This may be due to the complex nature of the issue of consuming counterfeit products, which can encompass multiple aspects analyzed by different scientific disciplines. Additionally, no single journal dominates in terms of published works on the topic of consuming counterfeit goods.

Furthermore, the main three areas of research on the issue of counterfeit product consumption cover the following: (1) online consumer behavior and ethical aspects, (2) consumption of counterfeit fashion products and brands, and (3) social aspects of counterfeit product consumption. In the context of research trends, on the other hand, the oldest publications mainly focused on the buying behavior of buyers when buying counterfeit products, especially in the fashion industry (the fashion industry is particularly vulnerable to unfair commercial practices). Subsequent studies have focused on the ethical aspect of the consumption of counterfeit goods, and more recent studies focus on the consumption and trade of counterfeit goods over the Internet and address the issue of the trade in counterfeit medicines.

Our study has several limitations that should be considered when generalizing the results. Firstly, we conducted the bibliometric analysis based on the Scopus database. Future research would have to be extended to other databases, such as WoS or Google Scholar, as some essential and valuable publications may have yet to be included in our analyses. Secondly, we excluded book chapters and restricted the search to documents written in English only, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. Thirdly, our analysis focused only on the demand side — future research could be extended to the supply side (company perspective) and address topics such as how to protect a brand's legal rights, how to cooperate with law enforcement and even cover financial losses from the illegal trade in counterfeit goods. Finally, VOSviewer, although a useful tool, has its limitations; most notably, to the best of our knowledge, this software does not distinguish between British English and American English varieties and can duplicate keywords in particular clusters. Furthermore, combining articles from different databases, e.g., WoS and Scopus, is impossible.

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