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Hidden psychological reasons among counterfeit and conspicuous fashion products: self-perceptions versus others' perceptions

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Abstract

The study of conspicuous and fashion products is central for the understanding of the role of material goods in social relationships and the impact of consumer culture on society. The present research examines the main differences between people's perceptions of themselves and their perception of how other people can judge them while using fashion products. In particular, their choice was compared between genuine and counterfeit, conspicuous or non-conspicuous items. Through experimental research, this paper reveals a common thought for genuine products in both self-perceptions and others' perceptions, since such products are more attractive to consumers who usually prefer to display their wealth and status. On one side, conspicuous fashion items increase the perception of having a higher self-image. Also, these products lead to a greater social adjustive function and expression of value in consumers if other people perceive fashion items as essential elements within social contexts. On the other side, counterfeit and conspicuous products will be seen as a lack of social status regarding how others judge people while using these products, projecting a negative influence on their perception. Overall, this study underscores the significance of comprehending the social consequences associated with fashion products and emphasizes the necessity of taking into account how others may perceive consumers based on their use of such items, and how this can impact their decision-making process.

Title: Hidden psychological reasons among Fashion items: self-perception versus others' perception

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Resumo

O estudo de produtos conspícuos e de moda é essencial para compreender a importância de bens materiais nas relações sociais e do seu impacto na sociedade. O estudo examina as principais diferenças entre percepções dos consumidores sobre si mesmos e a percepção relativamente aos outros e do seu julgamento perante o uso de determinados produtos de moda. Em particular, foi comparada qual a escolha do consumidor entre produtos genuínos e contrafeitos, conspícuos ou não conspícuos. Através de uma pesquisa experimental, conclui-se que existe um pensamento comum relativamente à escolha de produtos genuínos. O mesmo acontece no que toca a auto percepção e de outros, uma vez que estes produtos são mais atraentes para quem pretende exibir status.

Por um lado, itens de moda conspícuos aumentam a percepção de superioridade e autoimagem. Este tipo de produtos leva a uma maior função de ajuste social e expressão de valor nos consumidores, considerando que estes são necessários por outros em contextos sociais. Por outro lado, o uso de produtos falsificados e conspícuos serão vistos por outros, como falta de status, tendo uma influência negativa na sua percepção. No geral, o estudo destaca a importância de compreender as implicações sociais no que toca a produtos de moda e a importância da sua percepção perante outros. Este tipo de julgamento e percepção poderá ter impacto na escolha dos consumidores.

Título: Razões psicológicas ocultas entre itens de moda: auto-percepção versus percepção de outros.

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Palavras-chave: moda, conspícuo, falsificação, auto-percepção, percepção de outros

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Consumption has always characterized the human way of being in the world and is among the factors that determine the style of social life. In this regard, it is interesting to note that perhaps no other element in our society can dominate consumption and the physics behind it as much as fashion. Indeed, fashion items can fulfil a variety of roles other than functional performance. As well, fashion plays an important role in shaping cultural norms and ideals of beauty and style. (O'Cass and Hmily, 2002)

In 1899 Veblen introduced the concept of *conspicuous consumption*, that is, the consumption of status goods primarily for their status qualities. Despite progress and change over the years, this concept has always remained one of the key aspects for analyzing consumers and for understanding the main reasons behind their choices.

Although fashion items are frequently bought and consumed to signal social position or status, it is not unusual for a premium brand to supply both conspicuous and less or even non-conspicuous products. For the aim of this paper, *conspicuous fashion products* are defined as all those articles that have a high level of brand visibility and are therefore easily recognizable to public observers. Obviously, the consumption of conspicuous fashion products is one of the vehicles of conspicuous consumption, as a means to show their status. (Bian et al.; 2014; Phau et al.; 2009)

Moreover, not all possible consumers of conspicuous consumption are willing to afford what such products cost so there is a part of consumers who decide to buy counterfeit items.

Counterfeit is defined as the imitation of products, usually from a high-status or popular brand. They are almost the same or identically similar to genuine articles, to pass themselves off as genuine articles. These items are often produced and sold at a lower cost than the genuine versions and are made with lower-quality materials and craftsmanship. On the other side, on several occasions these products showed no significant differences in the quality perceived by consumers, thus leading to negative consequences for the genuine products, diminishing their symbolic value. (Phau et al.; 2009; Malik et al.; 2020, Randhawa et al.; 2015) Moreover, counterfeiting products could be either deceptive or nondeceptive. For this paper, only non-deceptive counterfeiting will be considered, the phenomenon of when consumers are aware that they are purchasing an imitation.

Generous amounts of studies, therefore, have tried to explain the reasons for the consumption of such products by analyzing the differences and perceptions between genuine and counterfeit items.

Since fashion products are defined as goods for which the mere use or display of a given product reflects consumer prestige, beyond any utilitarian value, previous researchers have analyzed such products by considering the pivotal scenario behind their purchase. So, literature provided studies about fashion products and the social motives behind the consumption and usage of these items. (Perez et al., 2010; Bian et al.; 2015; Phau et al.; 2009)

As such, the present research aims to explore the main socio-psychological reasons which drive consumers to the usage of fashion items, analyzing the main differences between genuine or counterfeit, conspicuous or non-conspicuous products.

Bearing in mind the important matter that fashion products are commonly used to communicate with the social context around consumers, the analysis of such socio-psychological reasons will be split up between the participant's perception of themselves while wearing such products and how other people will judge participants while wearing those products. Considering how the social context and the opinions of others influence consumer choices, it is therefore interesting to try to understand how the perception of ourselves sometimes differs from the perception of others. Indeed, studying diverse perceptions is relevant because differences in psychological distance might impact an essential trade-off in purchasing decisions.

In particular, this study aims to understand the differences between the different types of fashion products mentioned before (genuine and not, conspicuous and not), and the differences between the perceptions of others and personal perceptions, concerning the following variables: social power, Social-Adjustive and Value-Expressive Functions of Consumers, Status Consumption and self-image.

Dissertation structure

This paper is structured in several sections. The literature review will provide the main insights used to elaborate the research question and hypotheses of the study. The following chapter provides a description of the methodology, including an overview of the participants of the study, the materials used, the procedure and the design followed for the study. The findings of the survey and the statistical analysis will then be provided to answer the hypothesis. Finally, will be presented the conclusion of the study with research limitations and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2. Literature review

Consumption has been with us for millennia and has always defined the human sense of being “*in the world*”. This has increasingly forced all individuals to behave constantly and everywhere as consumers, placing consumption as the driver of existence for most people. This tendency has thus brought society to a breaking point, where people do not consume because driven by a primary need and or necessity, but rather more for the final result of seeking pleasure from the mere act of buying.

Indeed, in contemporary reality, we increasingly speak of *hedonic consumption*, understanding this concept as the consumption of goods and services aimed at the search for pleasure and emotional satisfaction through the act of consumption, rather than fulfilment for utilitarian reasons.

According to, hedonic consumption is driven by psychological and emotional factors, such as the desire for social status, self-expression, and identity.

In the fashion context, people who engage in this type of consumption often purchase and use fashion items for pleasure, emotional gratification and to enhance their self-image. It is driven by a desire for self-expression, social status, and personal enjoyment. Overall, it is a form of consumption that prioritizes personal pleasure and satisfaction over practicality.

2.1. Fashion definition

In an attempt to find the broadest notion of fashion, several definitions could be used to define this concept.

Overall, it is possible to refer to fashion with 'objective' dimensions that come to mind and that could be possibly related to this concept, such as new trends, a need of belonging to a reference group, or a cultural and social phenomenon.

According to the main purpose of this research, is interesting to regard fashion as a generalized behavioural concept and relate this phenomenon with the following definition:

“A clothing fashion is a culturally endorsed style of aesthetic expression in dress and adornment, which is discernible at any given time and changes over time within a social system of a group of associated individuals.” (Sproles, 1974)

Therefore, when fashion is linked to tangible products, it can have a variety of distinct characteristics that simultaneously carry intangible values for consumers who wear or use these products. (Sproles, 1974)

1. *Intangible qualities* reinforce consumers' perceptions, such as aesthetic sense, social acceptability, and self-gratification.
2. *Collective tastes* strengthen the feeling to be part of a social system
3. *Exclusivity*
4. *Psycho-social characteristics* that create or intensify notoriety, personal involvement and acceptance phenomena.
5. *Luxury items* since customers decide to pay a premium price for a desirable and appealing design. As well these products are related to luxury since are more attractive than other choices.
6. *Lifestyle function* with consumers could perceive social differences between different cultures, social roles, or personal positions.

So, for the remainder of this paper, the main emphasis is on interpreting the concept of fashion as a system of interacting elements, rather than merely a matter of functional utility.

2.2. Motives behind fashion consumption

Shopping gives people a sense of fulfilment. It gives many people a feeling of purpose and value in their lives. In addition, modern shoppers buy items to make a statement, show their personality or boost their self-esteem (Kasuma et al., 2014).

In terms of cultural and social context, it is clear how the modern psyche is strongly influenced by fashion and consumption (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004). This phenomenon, followed by an increase in the consumption of hedonic products lead to think that there is no other product that can be compared to fashion products. Such products have always been associated with the values they communicate to consumers rather than the primal needs that are satisfied by wearing clothes/accessories.

Therefore, according to Rucker and Galinsky (2009), motives behind consumption can be classified into two historical advertising strategies explained by Fox (1984), the *soft sell* and the *hard sell*. These two approaches appear to address two types of consumer demand.

The *soft sell strategy* plays on the positive outlook of using the product. This technique emphasizes how the user will obtain respect in the eyes of others rather than highlighting product attributes that give utilitarian advantages to the person over competing items. The soft sell approach refers to the desire to gain status and endorsement from others through one's purchasing decisions. Therefore, consumers who can be defined as high *self-monitors* will be concerned about 'fitting in' in a multitude of social contexts. This group also gives more emphasis to what others think of them and is therefore automatically more influenced by the image and status advertisements that can be achieved through the purchase of such products.

On the other hand, the *hard sell strategy* relies on the product's utilitarian attributes, such as quality and performance. The hard sell method focuses on how a product provides utility and functionality to the customer, rather than how others would perceive the person buying the item. Low *self-monitors* consumers, on the other hand, are less focused on fitting into the social context or opinion of others. As a matter of fact, this group is focused on their internal desires, which leads them to prefer utilitarian attributes of the product rather than mere status.

The two groups of consumers that emerged from these advertising strategies match the two types of customers that can be related to the fashion industry.

On one side some customers purchase for status reasons while on the other side, there are customers who purchase for functional reasons. Thus, the choice of purchasing clothes or accessories by these two groups will be guided by different attributes.

1. *Utilitarian consumers* will have an interest in products related to the quality of the product itself and not to the ostentation of the product logo, even if it is the most expensive clothing. For these reasons, this type of consumer can be matched with an audience that will prefer to buy genuine fashion products, knowing how the quality of these is provided by well-known brands.

2. *Status consumers* will instead have an attitude more related to the conspicuousness of the product, the aesthetic and its visibility than quality. But not all potential status consumers are willing to spend as much as fashion products cost. So, what are the alternatives for modern consumers who do not want to pay the high amounts requested by trendy luxury brands? Purchasing counterfeit premium brand items looks to be a possibility (Perez et al., 2010).

In line with Kaiser and Prandelli's (2008) study, people make assumptions about others based on what they own. Certainly, buyers often choose a specific style of products to show who they are, but more importantly, how they want to be seen by others.

Therefore, this study intends to analyse customers' differences in their choice between conspicuous and non-conspicuous products. These products will also be analysed through a product selection between counterfeit and genuine. This research will try to bring out knowledge about what leads consumers to have positive or negative attitudes towards these products by analysing the differences between people's perceptions of themselves and others' perceptions of people when they are wearing fashion products.

Therefore, the present **research questions** are:

Are customers wearing conspicuous fashion products to impress others or for themselves?

To what extent will these motivations drive customers towards counterfeit or authentic products?

2.3. Social Power

Many authors have attempted to define what power is, and the definitions that best apply in this research can be considered the following.

Power is a social variable according to which an individual's power can be explained concerning another individual or group. From another perspective, the sense of power is a structured, relationship-based concept rooted in relational experiences and a psychological extension of the socio-structural landscape (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006).

Moreover, social power is an important concept for a holistic insight into consumer behaviours, as the self-perception of social power influences the demand for certain types of products, such as fashion products; and in this case how this relationship may vary depending on the conspicuousness of the product (Bian et al.; 2014)

So, Fashion and social power have an intricate relationship since these items can both reflect and alter social power relationships. Fashion can convey a person's social position and identity, both supporting and generating new power systems.

By wearing branded luxury garments or accessories, people can communicate wealth, status and exclusivity, signalling to belong to a particular class or privileged social context (Veblen, 1899).

According to Rucker and Galinsky (2009), fashion items are especially valued by those who lack power since they provide a potential way to gain power. The two authors examined how the experience of high and low power creates different motivations, leading to distinctive

consumption patterns. In particular, it was discovered in their research that high power leads to a desire for fashion items that are seen to provide utilitarian advantages. On the other hand, those with limited power want ostentatious fashion products to communicate their status to others. These findings suggest that consumers use status items to indicate their social standing to compensate for a psychological condition of low power (thus fronting their perception of powerlessness).

As well, Bian et al., (2014) support how consumers resort to conspicuous products to cope with perceived powerlessness.

In addition, according to other studies by Barnett (2005), Nia and Zaichkowsky (2000) counterfeit products may not damage the perceived value of fashion goods but may even increase the status premium enjoyed by the users of such products.

Thus, Barnett (2005) found that consumers who purchased counterfeit luxury items believed that the products were of similar quality to authentic products and that owning a counterfeit item did not diminish the perceived value of owning a luxury item. In fact, the study found that owning a counterfeit item increased the perceived value of the authentic item for some consumers. This effect was more pronounced for consumers who valued the social status associated with luxury brands. Similarly, Nia and Zaichkowsky (2000) found that consumers who purchased counterfeit fashion items reported higher levels of satisfaction with their purchases compared to those who purchased authentic items. The researchers speculated that this was because counterfeit items were perceived to offer the same benefits as authentic items at a lower cost.

Therefore, the first hypotheses of this research emerged:

H1. a) *Conspicuous products tend to help consumers to be perceived by others as somebody who plays a high social power role in front of the audience.*

H1. b) *Counterfeit and conspicuous products lead to a higher perception of social power in consumers' perception of themselves but not according to the perception that others have.*

2.3. Social-Adjustive and Value-Expressive Functions of Consumers

The impact of others is a key predictor of an individual's comportment, and consumer behaviour cannot be properly interpreted without considering the impact of interpersonal influence on the development of attitudes, desires and purchasing behaviour. (Stafford, 1966)

Also, according to Li et al. (2020), people adopt certain consumption compartments linked to aspiration groups to establish a certain social identity or to be considered to belong to a desired group.

The extent to which this social pressure influences consumer habits is determined by their susceptibility to this pressure. As defined by Bearden et al. (1989), susceptibility is understood as the need to identify oneself, improve self-image in others' opinion and conform to the expectations of others concerning purchasing decisions.

Social-adjustive and value-expressive functions are two key motivations that drive human behavior in social contexts. Understanding these functions can help to better understand why people behave the way they do in social situations.

When individuals make purchasing choices to appear in the eyes of others, *value-expressive attitudes* aid people to communicate their values and self-identity to others. As explained by Grewal et al. (2004), consumers with such value-expressive attitudes, make consumption decisions by how others will respond to their decisions.

Furthermore, when people are driven by the need to fit in with the standards of others, purchasing and using goods to obtain acceptability in social situations, attitudes that serve a *social-adjustive function* aid them to achieve this. So, items that meet that function could help people achieve desired social objectives. More interestingly, these items could also provide people with the qualities they perceive as lacking. (Belk, 1988)

So, by following fashion, individuals identify with some people and differentiate themselves from others, but in the meantime, they can enjoy the feeling of expressing themselves in a common language that others can understand. (Simmel, 1957)

Based on the above discussion, the second hypothesis of this study states:

H2. *Conspicuous products lead to a greater social adjustive function and expression of value in consumers if other people perceive fashion items as a way to conform to expectations and improve self-image.*

2.4. Status Consumption

In our era, individuals are sensitive about the impression they make on others, and this involves paying more attention to their own image and to trends that the fashion world dictates. Through the use of status items as symbolic representations, individuals convey information

about themselves to their social context. Indeed, numerous buyers of fashion products buy items mainly to fulfil their desire for symbolic significance. (Husic & Cicic, 2009)

Status consumption could well be described as the motivating process by which individuals want to improve their social standing and prestige through acquiring conspicuous items that grant and show status for both the person and the perceived high-status social setting surrounding them. (Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn, 1999; O’Cass and Frost, 2002)

Moreover, not all people with this desire to appear in front of the audience have the financial resources to buy fashion items, since these items are usually rather expensive.

So, by buying cheap counterfeit items, and pretending to use originals, these consumers try to associate themselves with the image created by fashion brands, aided by their aura of prestige. (Perez, Castano, & Quintanilla, 2010)

On the other hand, according to Amaral and Loken (2016), there are several risks linked with the usage of counterfeits, suggesting that buyers are more uncertain about the advantages and prestige associated with such items. As a result, when customers observe analogous individuals utilizing a counterfeit product, the counterfeit may be perceived as a threat to the brand's symbolic value and distinctiveness concerning a social role. (Amaral and Loken, 2016)

Additionally, when customers from a higher social class witness the usage of a counterfeit garment, their opinions should be more favourable if the user belongs to a similar social background.

We can therefore assume that the general perception that others will have of consumers wearing counterfeit products will not be sharply positive or at least will be seen as a lack of status rather than a show of status.

Therefore, the following hypotheses emerged:

H3. a) *Genuine products are more attractive to consumers who use fashionable products to display their wealth and status than counterfeit alternatives.*

H3. b) *Since the garments consumers choose to wear are a way of signalling status to other consumers, counterfeit and conspicuous products can lead to higher social status in customers' perception of themselves. On the other side, these items will be seen as a lack of social status in others' perceptions.*

2.5. Self-Concept

Many literature reviews have attempted to provide a definition of what self-concept is, but to date, there are still several notions of how this concept can be well explained.

For example, Sirgy (1982) argued that self-concept can be split into two subtopics: self-image value and self-image belief. Specifically, “self-image value is the degree of value attached to a specific actual self-concept, and self-image belief is the degree of belief or perception strength associated with a self-image”.

According to Goldsmith et al. (1999), the wide issue of self-concept refers to the collection of beliefs individuals seem to have for themselves; it encompasses self-esteem, which is the value an individual perceives of himself and self-image, which is an individual’s impression of themselves as a person.

As mentioned by Graeff (1996), self-concept is the perception of abilities, boundaries, appearance, attributes and character that individuals have of themselves.

Therefore, the self is an interesting concept to analyse in relation to products, especially fashion items, as purchasing behaviour and consumption are actions that consumers take about their real or ideal self-image. Indeed, the consumption of conspicuous fashion products has been regarded as a vehicle for self-improvement. (Malik et al.; 2020)

However, as mentioned previously in this paper, the desire for fashion goods is also in this topic one reason to buy counterfeit if people cannot afford the price of these items. To this extent, it is essential to note that for individuals who are concerned about the opinion of others, it would be embarrassing if they were detected to be using counterfeit conspicuous products and perhaps, the 'loss of face' could be a disincentive towards the wearing of counterfeits. (Phau et al.; 2009)

Based on the above discussion, the hypotheses state:

H4. a) *Imagining oneself wearing authentic and conspicuous fashion garments increases the perception of having a higher self-image according to self-perception but not according to the judgement of others.*

Chapter 3. Methodology and Data Collection

3.1. Participants

A total of 254 questionnaires were completed during the time the survey was launched. Since questions were not mandatory, the number of participants that completed almost all the questions was a total of 153. Respondents were reached out by WhatsApp messages, by social media such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and through friends, colleagues and family. All of them responded voluntarily.

To find out the participants' age, an open-ended response was used. It appeared that most of the sample is in the age group between 18 and 30 years (69.3%, $n = 106$; $M=1.58$, $SD=1.05$).

The gender of participants is distributed as follows: 52.9% females, 45.1% males, 1.3% non-binary and 0.7% preferred not to disclose their gender.

The main first language used to fill out the survey was Italian since 65% of participants were Italians and they decide to respond in their native language. The other participants preferred to answer in English, as it turned out that the remaining sample was composed of the respondent from several countries such as Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, Ireland and Belgium

3.2. Materials

3.2.1. *Independent variables*

Product selection: counterfeit vs. original

Participants were randomly assigned to a type of product: genuine garment or counterfeit garment. Under both conditions, they were asked to imagine considering buying a clothing product from a luxury brand and to describe in a few words how does the product they imagined looks like. For the counterfeit condition, it was explicitly stated that it was a counterfeit product: *“Note, however, that this is a counterfeit product. That is, this is not a genuine product from that brand, but it is designed to look exactly like a genuine one, so it is very difficult to detect the inauthentic nature of the product.”* (Appendix 1)

The clothing product imagined at the beginning of the survey was used to respond to all the questions following presented in the survey.

Brand conspicuousness:

Participants' attitudes were randomly rated for a type of product: conspicuous product or non-conspicuous product. The description of this variable provided to participants was the same for both genuine and non-counterfeit products. The main difference was in specifying that the product *had a very clear, noticeable, and easily recognizable logo of the brand* or vice versa the product *design does not show a very clear or easily recognizable logo of the brand*.

Perceptions:

Participants were asked to judge for each scale presented their self-perceptions while wearing the fashion items and then how others would judge them while wearing the garment.

3.2.2. Dependent variables

The dependent variables used for this study are listed below and were used to analyze first the perception of participants thinking about themselves while wearing a fashion garment. The second part of this study focused on asking participants to think about others' beliefs and perceptions while they are wearing the garment imagined before.

Self-Concept

The self-Image variable was scored with a semantic differential scale. There were asked to respondents to assess each attribute object on a seven-point scale defined by polar adjectives. Then, participants were asked to think about the perception others would have while they were wearing the counterfeit garment they imagined earlier.

The adjectives proposed for both perceptions were: “Powerful - Weak”; “Pleased - Unpleased”; “Confident - Insecure”; “Stylish and fashionable - Out of style”; “Sophisticated – Non-sophisticated”; “Gorgeous – Non-Gorgeous”.

Afterwards to assess more deeply the self-perception and others' perceptions a four-items scale was used.

The items, ranked from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely) were the following for participants' perceptions: “By wearing this garment, I can identify with my social status”; “By wearing this garment I am a powerful person”; “By wearing this garment I have more prestige than usual”; “By wearing this garment I have a moral sense”.

For others' perceptions of the respondent, the items were: "Others can recognize my social status"; "Others can perceive me as a powerful person"; "Others can recognize my prestige"; "Others think I have a moral sense".

Reliability of the Scales: Self-image scale: $0.840 > 0.7$ with a total of 20 items;

Self-Image Self-Perception scale: $0.785 > 0.7$ (10 items);

Self-Image Other-Perception scale: $0.770 > 0.7$ (10 items).

Status consumption

To measure the participants' tendency to consume for status, the status consumption scale adapted from O'Cass & McEwen (2004) was used.

So, participants were asked to rate between 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely) how the garment they imagined before is a symbol of success, prestige, wealth, achievement, and personal image enhancement. Thus, were asked to participants to rate these symbols first considering how much status they perceive of themselves and following how much status they think others see in them while wearing such products. (Appendix 1)

Reliability of the Scales: Status consumption scale: $0.944 > 0.7$ with a total of 12 items;

Status Consumption Self-Perception scale: $0.937 > 0.7$ (6 items);

Status Consumption Other-Perception scale: $0.961 > 0.7$ (6 items).

Social-Adjustive and Value-Expressive Functions of Consumers

To measure participants' involvement with fashion products, their social-adjustive and value-expressive functions were evaluated on a scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely). Their perceptions were assessed through five items (Rajdeep Grewal, Raj Mehta, & Frank R. Kardes, 2004) adapted for counterfeit conspicuous or non-conspicuous products and genuine conspicuous or non-conspicuous products.

This scale was presented first to analyse participants' perceptions of items such as: "It is important for me that others know the brand I wear" or "A counterfeit fashion product is a symbol of social status", see all items in Appendix 1.

Secondly, the scale used to analyse the perceptions about what others would think about participants was composed by items such as: "For others, it is important to know the brand I wear" or "For others, a counterfeit fashion product is a symbol of social status", see all items in Appendix 1. All components were rated on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely).

Reliability of the Scales: Social-Adjustive and Value-Expressive Functions scale: $0.840 > 0.7$ with a total of 9 items;

Status Consumption Self-Perception scale: $0.822 > 0.7$ (5 items);

Status Consumption Other-Perception scale: $0.827 > 0.7$ (4 items).

Social Power

A generalized version of the Sense of Power scale developed by Anderson & Galinsky (2006) was used to assess participants' feelings. This scale was used to investigate participants' power in their relationship with others while wearing a fashion garment.

Precisely, for analyzing the own perception of participants there were asked to indicate how well the statements provided describe them in their relationships with others if they are wearing the garment they have imagined before.

The scale included six components: “I can get people to listen to what I say”; “I can get others to do what I want”; “Even if I voice them, my views have no influence”; “I think I have a great deal of power”; “My ideas and opinions are often ignored”; “If I want to, I get to make the decisions”.

Next, participants were asked to indicate what others would think about them while wearing the garment they had imagined before. The scale used for the other’s perception included as well six components: “Others think I can get people to listen to what I say”; “Others think that I can get others to do what I want”; “Others think that even if I express them, my opinions have no influence”; “Others think I have a lot of power”; “Others think my ideas and opinions are often ignored”; “Others think If I want to, I make the decisions”. All components were rated on a scale from 1 (Does not describe me at all) to 7 (Describe me very well).

Reliability of the Scales: Social Power scale: $0.917 > 0.7$ with a total of 12 items;

Social Power Self-Perception scale: $0.890 > 0.7$ (6 items);

Social Power Other-Perception scale: $0.875 > 0.7$ (6 items).

Table 1. Statistical analysis on scales reliability

Scale	SI	SISP	SISO	SC	SCSP	SCOP	SAVE	SAVESP	SAVEOP	SP	SPSP	SPOP
Cronbach Alpha	.840	.758	.770	.944	.937	.961	.840	.822	.827	.917	.890	.875

3.3. Procedure

First of all, participants were briefed that they would participate in a study for a Master's Thesis on the topic of Marketing and Hedonic experience and it was declared that the information provided is strictly confidential and data are completely anonymous and confidential.

After this short introduction, respondents were then randomly assigned to one condition of Independent variable 1 (counterfeit or genuine products) and then they were assigned to one condition of independent variable 2 (conspicuous or non-conspicuous products)

The questionnaire was divided into four blocks: the first block required participants to imagine and describe the product of the study, the second block investigated participants' perceptions, the third block questioned other people's perceptions, and the fourth block collected demographic data.

In the first block, to ensure clarity and coherence among the participants, it was first explained objectively what the garment looks like and presented two explanatory examples of the garment to participants.

After seeing these examples and being clear on what is meant by the fashion product objectives of the study there was asked to describe in a few words how the product they imagine buying looks like and what the brand related to. (Appendix 1)

Furthermore, if participants were redirected to the counterfeit condition were highlighted to note that was a counterfeit product,

The objective of providing a free interpretation of the product was designed to engage participants and especially not to force them to think about brands or fashion items they might not like, which could have negatively influenced the research.

The questions presented in the second block aim to investigate self-perception. Thus, five scales related to self-image, status consumption, social-adjustive and value-expressive functions, and social power were presented.

According to one of the four potential conditions (genuine or counterfeit garment with or without a noticeable logo) the questions used for the scale in the four surveys were slightly different. For self-image was asked how would they feel wearing the garment they imagine

before. Following, there were asked to rate how well four statements described their perception related to one of the possible product combinations. The level of agreement on five items of the status consumption scale was then assessed. In addition, their opinion was asked about a series of symbols that the garment could represent. The participants' attitudes were assessed through the functions of social regulation and value expression, rated on a scale of 1 to 7.

Finally, the variable of social power was measured by asking how much the six statements describe them in their relationships with others if they wear the garment.

The purpose of the third block is to analyze participants' perceptions of how other people would perceive them in a situation where they are wearing the garment.

Before the questions were proposed to the participants, it was explained what would be investigated as follows: *“Now we want you to think about what others would think, their perceptions and beliefs while you are wearing the garment you imagined before...”*

In this block, the same questions were presented as in the second block, the difference being the previous block was the questions were aimed at asking participants to consider others' perceptions of them. For example, for the self-image, they were asked to describe, according to the scale presented, what the perception of others would be while wearing the garment imagined before. (Appendix 1)

The final block was designed to collect demographic data by asking about their gender, age, nationality, educational level, monthly liquid disposable income (after taxes) and current occupation.

3.4. Design

The experiment had a mixed design with 2 products selection (genuine, counterfeit) x 2 types of products (conspicuous, non-conspicuous) and 2 perceptions (self-perception, others' perception) as a within-subject factor.

Each participant was assigned to only product selection and one product type condition.

Chapter 4. Result Analysis

4.1. Sample characterization

The sample was divided into 52.9% between females ($n = 81$), 45.1% males ($n = 69$), 1.3% non-binary and 0.7% preferred not to disclose their gender, together they formed the total population of the study ($n = 153$).

As Figure 1 shows 69.3%, of respondents ($n = 106$) were young age, between 18-30 years old. Regarding the educational levels most of the respondents had Bachelors' or High School qualifications, followed by 35.3% of the sample who had a Master's Degree.

In terms of occupational profiles, as expected, the sample was composed of 43.1% employed, 24.2% of worker-students and 15% of students. The remainder of the sample was divided between self-employed or unemployed/retired.

The respondents were the majority Italians, followed by Portuguese and according to the average gross income in these countries, most of the respondents (51.6%,) had an income range of 1001-3000€.

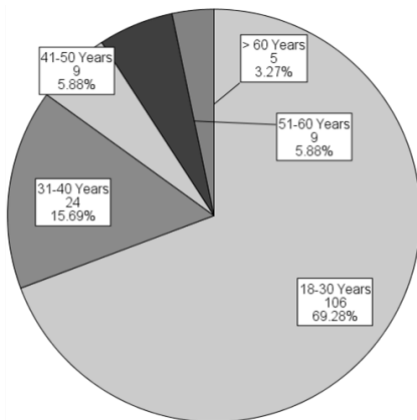


Figure 1 Respondents' age group

4.2. Data screening

4.2.1. Data normality

The checking of data normality was done with skewness and kurtosis values (Hair JR, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). Since values were beyond the criteria, data was normally distributed therefore the selection of parametric tests was justified.

4.2.2. Outliers' detection

Regarding outliers' detection, in the analysis, there were some outliers present however no extreme outliers were detected.

4.2.3. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlational Statistics

Analysing mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for the study variables provides useful clues on how any respondent has replied to the details in the questionnaires and how useful the scales and corresponding entries are to drawing on the related theories. (Table 2)

In addition, correlations among research variables give hints on how well the variables are related to one another i.e., what linear association 'if any' is presently stuck among the variables. To ascertain in what way the variables are correlated to one another, correlations among the study variables were calculated which can be reviewed in the table below.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlations

	M	SD	SISP	SCSP	SAVESP	SPSP	SIOP	SCOP	SAVEOP	SPOP
SISP	3.45	1.13	1							
SCSP	3.41	1.78	.385**	1						
SAVESP	3.19	1.47	.272**	.692**	1					
SPSP	2.91	1.47	.170*	.545**	.651**	1				
SIOP	3.49	1.04	.524**	.190*	.215**	.208**	1			
SCOP	3.92	1.79	.224**	.556**	.509**	.347**	.272**	1		
SAVEOP	3.97	1.51	0.027	.344**	.416**	.304**	.175*	.418*	1	
SPOP	3.14	1.42	.168*	.546**	.591**	.662**	.189*	.598*	.412**	1

$N = 153$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

SISP: self-image self-perception; **SCSP**: status consumption self-perception; **SAVESP**: social-adjustive and value-expressive self-perception; **SPSP**: social power self-perception; **SIOP**: self-image others-perception; **SCOP**: status consumption others perception; **SAVEOP**: social-adjustive and value-expressive others perception; **SPOP**: social power others perception.

4.3. In-depth analysis

The following section is divided by several hypotheses and presents the statistical analysis performed to evaluate the data collected from the survey.

4.3.1. Perceived Social Power

The overall perception of conspicuous products did not show significant differences in self-perception of social power ($M_{\text{conspicuous}}=2.73$, $SD_{\text{conspicuous}}=1.50$) than non-conspicuous products ($M_{\text{non-conspicuous}}=3.06$, $SD_{\text{non-conspicuous}}=1.43$; $t_{(151)} = 1.38$, $p = .170$). Similarly, there were no significant differences in others' perceptions of social power between conspicuous ($M=3.02$, $SD=1.49$) and non-conspicuous products ($M=3.25$, $SD=1.35$; $t_{(151)} = 1.024$, $p = .307$). Thus, the analysis doesn't find statistically significant results to prove that conspicuous products are directly and significantly associated with a higher social power perception.

Nevertheless, it was found statistical differences in self-perception of social power between genuine ($M_{\text{genuine}}=3.26$, $SD_{\text{genuine}}=1.52$) and counterfeit products ($M_{\text{counterfeits}}=2.56$, $SD_{\text{counterfeits}}=1.33$; $t_{(151)} = -3.049$, $p=.003$). The difference between genuine and counterfeit items is larger for genuine items than for counterfeits. Also, according to others' perception of social power, it was found statistical significance between genuine ($M_{\text{genuine}}=3.50$, $SD_{\text{genuine}}=1.45$) and counterfeit products ($M_{\text{counterfeits}}=2.80$, $SD_{\text{counterfeits}}=1.30$; $t_{(151)} = -3.168$, $p=.002$). This difference is larger for genuine items than for counterfeits.

The analysis doesn't find statistically significant results to prove that conspicuous products are directly and significantly associated with a higher social power perception. Contrarily, it was found that there is a statistical significance that genuine products lead to a higher level of social power in both self and others' perception.

Following, a repeated measure ANOVA results showed that Social Power was different between Counterfeit or Genuine products, ($F(1, 149) = 27.791$, $p < .001$). However, this variable was not different between Conspicuous and Non-Conspicuous products, ($F(1, 149) = .729$, $p = .395$.) Likewise, the interaction between Conspicuous and Non-Conspicuous and Counterfeit and Genuine was also unable to predict any difference between self-perception and others' perception ($F(1, 149) = 1.371$, $p = .244$).

Resulting, the analysis showed that the difference in perceived social power between others' perception ($M = 3.54$) and self-perception ($M = 2.63$) under Non-Conspicuous & Counterfeit products was statistically significant ($MD = .91$, $p = .001$). Others' perception of social power ($M = 4.33$) was also higher than self-perception ($M = 3.50$) under Non-Conspicuous & Genuine products, and this difference was also statistically significant ($MD = .83$, $p = .005$). Similarly, Others' perception ($M = 2.89$) was higher than self-perception ($M = 2.47$) under Conspicuous & Counterfeit products, but this difference was not statistically significant ($MD = .42$, $p = .166$).

Finally, others' perception ($M = 4.96$) was also higher than self-perception ($M = 3.00$) under Conspicuous & Genuine products, and this difference was statistically significant ($MD = 1.96$, $p < .001$). Subsequently, it can be implied that others' perception of social power had higher scores than self-perception and this implication was significant under Non-Conspicuous & Counterfeit, Non-Conspicuous & Genuine, and Conspicuous & Genuine interactions

Tables 3. Group Statistic – Social Power

	Product Type	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Power	Conspicuous	2.7300	1.49612
	Non-Conspicuous	3.0569	1.43377
Self-Perception	Genuine	3.2644	1.52189
	Counterfeit	2.5598	1.3333
Social Power	Conspicuous	3.0188	1.48579
	Non-Conspicuous	3.2541	1.35432
Others Perception	Genuine	3.5044	1.44960
	Counterfeit	2.7991	1.30278

Brand conspicuousness	Product Selection	Self-perception Mean	Others' perception Mean	MD	Sig.
Non-Conspicuous	Counterfeit	2.64	3.54	.91	.001
	Genuine	3.50	4.33	.83	.005
Conspicuous	Counterfeit	2.47	2.89	.42	.166
	Genuine	3.00	4.96	1.96	.000

4.3.2. Perceived Social Adjustive and Value Expressive functions

As predicted, in others' perception, conspicuous products lead to a significantly higher level of social adjustive and value-expressive functions ($M_{\text{conspicuous}}=4.18$, $SD_{\text{conspicuous}}=1.57$) than non-conspicuous products ($M_{\text{non-conspicuous}}=3.70$, $SD_{\text{non-conspicuous}}=1.41$; $t_{(151)} = 2.41$, $p = .017$). However, such a difference between conspicuous ($M_{\text{conspicuous}}=3.22$, $SD_{\text{conspicuous}}=1.56$) and non-conspicuous ($M_{\text{non-conspicuous}}=3.16$, $SD_{\text{non-conspicuous}}=1.40$) is non-significant for self-perceptions.

So, this test reveals statistically significant results to prove that conspicuous products lead to a greater social adjustive function and expression of value by analysing others' perceptions.

Table 4 Group Statistics - Social-Adjustive and Value-Expressive Functions

	Product Type	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Adjustive Value Expressive Self-Perception	Conspicuous	3.2169	1.55903
	Non-Conspicuous	3.1634	1.40374
Social Adjustive Value Expressive Others Perception	Conspicuous	4.2852	1.56770
	Non-Conspicuous	3.7043	1.41265

4.3.3. Perceived Status Consumption

As predicted, according to self-perception, genuine products lead to a significantly higher level of status consumption ($M_{\text{genuine}}=4.14$, $SD_{\text{genuine}}=1.60$) rather than counterfeit products ($M_{\text{counterfeit}}=2.70$, $SD_{\text{counterfeit}}=1.65$; $t_{(151)}=5.457$, $p = .00$). Similarly, also in others' perception genuine lead to a significant level of status consumption ($M_{\text{genuine}}=4.62$, $SD_{\text{genuine}}=1.49$) than counterfeit products ($M_{\text{counterfeit}}=3.24$, $SD_{\text{counterfeit}}=1.80$; $t_{(151)}=5.132$, $p = .00$).

Thus, according to the results, the differences between genuine and counterfeit products is larger for both self-perceptions and others' perception, meaning that such items led to a significant level of status consumption.

Following, a repeated measure ANOVA results showed that Status Consumption was different between Counterfeit or Genuine products ($F(1, 149) = 38.074$, $p < .001$) Differently, Status Consumption was not different between Conspicuous and Non-Conspicuous products, ($F(1, 149) = .000$, $p = .994$). Likewise, the interaction between Conspicuous and Non-Conspicuous and Counterfeit and Genuine products was also unable to predict any difference between self-perception and others' perception ($F(1, 149) = .495$, $p = .483$).

Then, the analysis showed that Non-Conspicuous & Counterfeit products lead to a higher level of status consumption in others' perception ($M_{\text{non-consp\&counterfeit}}= 3.54$) than self-perception ($M_{\text{non-consp\&counterfeit}}= 2.55$) and this difference was statistically significant ($MD = .99$, $p < .001$).

Moving to Non-Conspicuous & Genuine products, results showed that others' perception ($M_{\text{non-consp\&genuine}} = 4.33$) was also higher than self-perception ($M_{\text{non-consp\&genuine}}= 4.28$), but here this difference was not statistically significant ($MD = .04$, $p = .872$). Under Conspicuous & Counterfeit products it was revealed that other-perception ($M_{\text{consp\&counterfeit}} = 2.89$) was higher than self-perception ($M_{\text{consp\&counterfeit}}= 2.88$), but again this difference was not statistically significant ($MD = .02$, $p = .946$). Finally, under Conspicuous & Genuine products Others'

perception ($M_{\text{consp}\&\text{genuine}} = 4.96$) was higher than self-perception ($M_{\text{consp}\&\text{genuine}} = 3.97$) and this difference was statistically significant ($MD = .99, p < .001$).

Subsequently, it can be implied that regarding Status Consumption, others' perceptions had higher scores than self-perception and this implication was significant for Non-Conspicuous & Counterfeit and Conspicuous & Genuine interactions.

Tables 5 Group Statistics - Status Consumption

	Product Type	Mean	Std. Deviation
Status Consumption	Genuine	4.1378	1.60526
Self-Perception	Counterfeit	2.7009	1.64978
Status Consumption	Genuine	4.6200	1.48909
Others Perception	Counterfeit	3.2436	1.80641

Brand conspicuousness	Product Selection	Self-perception Mean	Others' perception Mean	MD	Sig.
Non-Conspicuous	Counterfeit	2.55	3.54	.99	.000
	Genuine	4.28	4.33	.04	.872
Conspicuous	Counterfeit	2.88	2.89	.02	.946
	Genuine	3.97	4.96	.99	.000

4.3.4. Self-concept

A repeated measure ANOVA results showed that the perceptions of self-concept were different between Counterfeit or Genuine products, ($F(1, 149) = 8.307, p = .005$) but was not different between Conspicuous and Non-Conspicuous products, ($F(1, 149) = .124, p = .725$). Likewise, the interaction between Conspicuous and Non-Conspicuous and Counterfeit and Genuine was also unable to predict any difference between self-perception and others' perception, ($F(1, 149) = .058, p = .811$).

Following, the analysis showed that under the Conspicuous & Counterfeit products condition, self-perception of self-concept ($M_{\text{consp}\&\text{counterfeit}} = 3.49$) was higher than others' perception ($M_{\text{consp}\&\text{counterfeit}} = 2.64$) and this difference was statistically significant ($MD = .85, p = .002$).

Thus, it can be implied that the self-perception of perceived self-concept had higher scores than others' perceptions and this implication was significant under Conspicuous & Counterfeit interaction.

Table 6 Group Statistics – Self Concept

Brand conspicuousness	Product Selection	Self-perception Mean	Others' perception Mean	MD	Sig.
Non-Conspicuous	Counterfeit	3.24	2.93	.31	.227
	Genuine	3.56	3.59	.04	.888
Conspicuous	Counterfeit	3.49	2.64	.85	.002
	Genuine	3.56	3.41	.15	.584

4.4. Overview of the results

H1. A) *Conspicuous products tend to help consumers to be perceived by others as somebody who plays a high social power role in front of the audience. H1. B)* *Counterfeit and conspicuous products lead to a higher perception of social power in consumers' perception of themselves but not according to the perception that others have.*

The analysis doesn't find statistically significant results to prove that conspicuous products are directly and significantly associated with a higher social power perception. Next, it was found that there is a statistical significance that genuine products lead to a higher level of social power in both self and others' perception.

Following, while considering both conspicuous and counterfeit products was also shown how such products don't lead to a higher perception of social power than genuine and non-conspicuous.

H2. *Conspicuous products lead to a greater social adjustive function and expression of value in consumers if other people perceive fashion items as a way to conform to expectations and improve self-image.*

As expected, it was found statistically significant results suggested that conspicuous products lead to a greater social adjustive function and expression of value by analysing how others would judge consumers while they are wearing fashion garment

H3. a) *Genuine products are more attractive to consumers who use fashionable products to display their wealth and status than counterfeit alternatives. H3. b)* *Since the garments consumers choose to wear are a way of signalling status to other consumers,*

counterfeit and conspicuous products can lead to higher social status in customers' perception of themselves. On the other side, these items will be seen as a lack of social status in others' perceptions.

For consumers who wear fashion products as a symbol of status consumption, it was revealed that for both self-perception and others' perception, genuine items are preferred rather than counterfeit. Instead, while studying the perception that consumers have about counterfeit and conspicuous products results reveal on one hand that such products cannot lead to higher social status in their perceptions. On the other hand, analysing the expected perceptions of other people, this did not reveal a preference for counterfeit and conspicuous products when consuming for status. Thus, one can therefore state how such products are perceived as lacking social status in the perception of others.

H4. a) *Imagining oneself wearing authentic and conspicuous fashion garments increases the perception of having a higher self-image according to self-perception but not according to the judgement expected to be held by others.*

According to the results, there wasn't significant evidence between self-perception and others' perception that genuine and conspicuous products will increase the perception of gaining a higher self-image.

Chapter 5. Main Conclusion and Future Research

Acquisition and consumption of counterfeit products are morally questionable consumer behaviour, nevertheless nowadays is an increasing phenomenon in several industries. (Viot et al., 2014) Among these, one of the most studied cases belongs to the world of fashion. The reasons behind this are easily understandable as the world of fashion has always been associated with premium products, which require a high economic investment, and these products also have a fairly short product life cycle compared to other items.

So, the consumption of fashion garments or accessories cannot be afforded to everyone but at the same time, the fashion world seems a sector able to involve a huge number of consumers since ever.

Furthermore, another key concept related to the world of fashion is related to all the non-price determinants, such as psychographic, demographic, and product-attribute variables that significantly impact consumers' intention to use fashion items. (Wee et al., 1995)

This paper extends the scope of comprehension of the impact of psychological and product-attribute on consumption patterns and consumer choice. Particularly it is focused to enrich the knowledge about how consumer perceptions differ in terms of choice when considering their views of themselves versus what others people will think about them. Such difference was analysed by presenting products that differ in terms of visibility of the brand, in this paper named product conspicuousness, and in terms of types of products, distinguishing between genuine and counterfeit.

This research, therefore, suggests that attitudes towards authentic products are similar between both self and others' perceptions. Likewise, results showed that there were no such differences between self-perception and others' perception according to counterfeit products.

Additionally, the conspicuousness of products is also a common feature of the two perceptions, as such products allow individuals to communicate to others who they are and by which environment they are coming. Indeed, conspicuous products lead to a greater social adjustive function and expression of value in consumers if other people perceive fashion items as essential elements within social contexts.

5.1. The effect of social power

This paper extends previous research on how conspicuous products lead to a higher level of social power and how such products differ between counterfeit and genuine products.

Research has shown that the consumption of conspicuous products is positively correlated with perceived social power by others. Because conspicuous products are those that are highly visible and convey status or wealth, when individuals consume these products, they may be perceived as more powerful and influential by others, as they signal high social status and financial resources (Belk, 1988; Veblen, 1899). This perception of power can confer a variety of benefits, including increased social influence, admiration, and respect (Berger & Heath, 2007).

Moreover, Bian et al., (2015) research provides proof that social power and product conspicuousness combine to influence customer demand for counterfeit items. Importantly, they also found that the effect of manipulating social power and product conspicuousness is specific to counterfeit items and not found with genuine products.

The present work, therefore, was expected to expand on the above-mentioned research and all the others mentioned. However, the sample collected does not show statistical evidence that conspicuous products tend to help consumers to be perceived by others as somebody who plays a high social power role in front of the audience. Additionally, there was also no evidence that counterfeit and conspicuous products lead to a higher perception of social power in the consumer's perception of themselves. The same result was retrieved analysing participants perceptions of what others will think about them.

One of the reasons why this may have been the case is perhaps related to a redundancy of the questions asked in the section analysing one's own perception and subsequently the perception of others. Moreover, as it was an online survey, it was neither possible to control the attention of the respondents, nor to support them with any clarifications.

5.2. The effect of social adjustive and value expressive function

As Belk (1988) proposes, the social adjustive function of conspicuous consumption suggests that people use fashion goods to fit in with their social group and to conform to social norms. In other words, people purchase luxury goods because they believe that these products will help them to gain acceptance and approval from their social group. This concept is

supported by several research that suggests that consumers who are concerned with their social status are more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption.

The expression of value through conspicuous consumption is another important aspect of this phenomenon. Consumers use luxury goods to communicate their values to others and to signal their tastes and preferences.

However, the effectiveness of conspicuous consumption in showing social status and values depends on the perception of others. If others do not recognize fashion goods as essential elements of social context, then the social function of conspicuous consumption may be weakened.

These insights were indeed supported and extended with this paper, which statistically supports the hypothesis that conspicuous products lead to a greater social adjustive function and expression of value in consumers if other people perceive fashion items as essential elements within social contexts.

5.3. Status consumption function

It has been thoroughly researched that consumers often use the products they buy to communicate their social status and display their wealth. For example, a study by Vigneron and Johnson (1999) found that fashion brands are often used as a way for consumers to signal their social status to others. However, it is important to note that genuine products are even more attractive to consumers who use fashionable products to display their wealth and status. One reason for this is that genuine products are often seen as more prestigious and exclusive than counterfeit or imitation products.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, for others consumers counterfeit articles will provide them with a sense of social acceptance and signal their social status to others. Such consumers will probably not value the negative aspects related to counterfeiting, as they are only interested in the intangible values related to such products.

Therefore, this paper aimed to extend the earlier research and added value by attempting to study the differences between genuine and non-genuine products.

In addition, a dedicated analysis was then made only for counterfeit and conspicuous products, to see if such products differed between the perceptions individuals have of themselves and the perceptions others would have of them while wearing fashion garments or accessories.

The findings obtained demonstrate first that in both self-perceptions and others' perceptions, there is a common thought that genuine products are more attractive to consumers who use fashionable products to display their wealth and status. Additionally, It was also shown that counterfeit and conspicuous products will be seen as a lack of social status in others' perceptions.

5.4. Self-concept function

The concept of self is pivotal in the context of fashion because the clothes that people wear can have a significant impact on how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them. However, the relationship between self-concept and conspicuous fashion garments is complex. On one hand, wearing these types of garments may help individuals enhance their self-concept by signalling to others that they have high status and social power.

On the other hand, individuals who rely too heavily on conspicuous fashion garments to bolster their self-concept may experience negative consequences, such as feeling pressure to constantly maintain their appearance and facing criticism from others who perceive them as being shallow or materialistic (Rucker & Galinsky, 2009).

To extend these studies, this paper proposes a new approach to counterfeit and conspicuous fashion items, finding out how such items can improve people's self-concept. On the other hand, when consumers imagine how others will judge them while wearing these garments, a common negative thought emerges. This result is consistent with the statements of Rucker & Galinsky (2009) and this can also be supported since people's self-concept tends to justify illicit purchases, but according to observers' perceptions, such behaviour is not viewed positively.

5.6. Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation contains several limitations that could be outlined to offer opportunities for future research.

The first limitation was the sample size since although there were collected 254 answers, it was possible only to use parts of them since some respondents skip some questions. In addition, since the total sample was randomized around one of the four conditions, each condition had

an average of 40 answers, which can be a smaller number. Also, this sample was not widely different, since the majority of respondents were Italian and aged between 18 to 30 years old. Furthermore, respondents were reached via WhatsApp messages, social media and through friends or colleagues, resulting in a sample from more or less the same clusters.

Thus, for future research bot a varied and higher sample would enhance the accuracy of the results.

Secondly, since the survey was online there is a margin of distraction among the participants that may negatively influence the answers given. Therefore, future research could use laboratories to provide a suitable environment for respondents, avoiding distractions. Also, this approach would allow for clarification of any doubts during the survey.

Thirdly, the study gave the respondents the opportunity to imagine themselves wearing any piece of clothing. To obtain more truthful data, future research could provide respondents with a specific item of clothing. Furthermore, future research could also analyse the differences between an item of clothing and fashion accessories, as these may differ in terms of interesting statistics and results.

Fourthly, the questionnaire asked each participant to first answer about their own perception and how they expected others to perceive them. Analysing these two perceptions in the same survey could confuse the respondents, but more importantly, could lead to redundant and similar answers. Thus, in future research, it would be interesting to randomise participants between these two conditions as well, so that participants would only focus on one of the two perceptions proposed in this study, thus narrowing the bias.

Finally, it would be interesting to supplement this research with qualitative research, using questionnaires and focus groups. This would allow for an even better study of respondents' answers, getting to the root of the reasons behind them. In addition, qualitative research would allow to present of several types of clothing items to respondents. This would allow the research to be expanded by going to analyse the possible differences between different types of clothing (studying the differences between products that are visible to others and those that are not, for example, undergarments versus a jacket).

Several studies have shown that variables such as willingness to purchase such products, and prior attitude toward buying counterfeit products are interesting to analyse. Since this study does not consider these variables, future research may extend the study by proposing a new approach.

Chapter 6. Appendix

Appendix 1. Survey Structure

Introduction to the Survey

Welcome and thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this survey.

I am a Master's student from Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics.

This survey is part of my study for the Master's Thesis on the topic of Marketing and Hedonic experience and it will take about 3 min to complete. It is crucial for me that you finish it. The information provided is strictly confidential and your data will remain completely anonymous and confidential. Therefore, I kindly ask you to answer honestly and spontaneously. You can switch the language of the survey from EN to IT at any time if you wish.

If you have any questions or feedback, please e-mail me: at s-ccasale@ucp.pt

Thank you very much for your time!

RANDOMIZATION: participants are redirect to one of the following condition

- I. Conspicuous and counterfeit products
- II. Non-conspicuous and counterfeit products
- III. Conspicuous and genuine products
- IV. Non-conspicuous and genuine products

(Conspicuous Product Survey Type) Imagine that you are considering buying a clothing product (a sweatshirt or t-shirt) from a luxury brand. Imagine this garment looks luxurious and its design shows a very clear, noticeable, and easily recognizable logo of the brand. Below you can see some examples:



(Non-conspicuous Products) *Imagine that you are considering buying a clothing product (a sweatshirt or t-shirt) from a luxury brand. Imagine this garment looks luxurious but its design does not show a very clear or easily recognizable logo of the brand. Below you can see some examples:*



Q1. Please, describe in a few words how the product you imagined looks like _____

Q2. Which brand are you thinking of? _____

Block. 1

(Only for Counterfeit Products) *Note, however, that this is a counterfeit product. That is, this is not a genuine product from that brand, but it is designed to look exactly like a genuine one, so it is very difficult to detect the inauthentic nature of the product.*

Q3. Please describe on the following scale how would you feel wearing the garment* you imagine before.

Powerful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Weak
Pleased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unpleased
Confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Insecure
Stylish and fashionable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Out of style
Sophisticated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not sophisticated
Gorgeous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not gorgeous

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Q4. Please rate how well the following statements describe your perception on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely).

	1 Not at all						7 Extremely
By wearing this garment, I can identify with my social status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By wearing this garment, I am a powerful person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By wearing this garment, I have more prestige than usual	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By wearing this garment, I have a moral sense	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5. On a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely), please indicate how much you agree with the following statements: In my opinion, the *garment** I imagined before is a symbol of ...

	1 Not at all						7 Extremely
Success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prestige	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wealth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal achievement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enhancement of my image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Q6. Please indicate how well the following statements describe you on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely)

	1 Not at all						7 Extremely
It is important for me that others know the brand I wear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A <i>fashion product*</i> is a symbol of social status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A <i>fashion product*</i> helps me to fit into important social situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand a person wears tells me a lot about that person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A <i>fashion product*</i> tells other what kind of person I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Q7. Please indicate how well the following statements describe you in your relationships with others if you are wearing the *garment** you have imagined before. Rate the following items on a scale from 1 (Does not describe me at all) to 7 (Describe me very well)

	1 Not at all				7 Extremely			
I can get people to listen to what I say	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can get others to do what I want	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even If I voice them, my views have no influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think I have a great deal of power	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My ideas and opinions are often ignored	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I want to, I get to make the decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Block. 2

*Now we want you to think about what others would think, their perceptions and beliefs while you are wearing the *garment** you imagined buying before...*

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Q8. Please describe on the following scale what would be other's perceptions of you while you are wearing the *garment** you imagine before

Powerful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Weak
Pleased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unpleased
Confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Insecure
Stylish and fashionable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Out of style
Sophisticated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not sophisticated
Gorgeous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not gorgeous

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Q9. On a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely), please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

	1 Not at all				7 Extremely			
Others can recognize my social status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others can perceive me as a powerful person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others can recognize my prestige	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others think I have a moral sense	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10. On a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely), please indicate how you agree with the following:
Considering the opinion of others, the garment* I selected before could be a symbol of ...

	1 Not at all						7 Extremely
Success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prestige	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wealth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal achievement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enhancement of my image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Q.11 Please indicate on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely) how well the following statements describe the other's opinion

	1 Not at all						7 Extremely
For others, It is important to know the brand I wear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For others, a <u>fashion product</u> * is a symbol of social status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In order to be a part/fit into important social situations, others need to wear <u>fashion product</u> *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For others, the brand I wear might say a lot about who I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Q12. Please indicate how you imagine the others' perception of your power if you are wearing the garment* you were thinking of before on a scale from 1 (Not describe it at all) to 7 (Describe it very well)

	1 Not at all						7 Extremely
Others think I can convince people to listen to what I say	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others think that I can convince others to do what I want	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others think that even If I express them, my opinions have no influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others think I have a great deal of power	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others think that my ideas and opinions are often ignored	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others think that If I want to, I make the decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* The type of product was specified according to the randomization (4 options: garment; counterfeit garment; garment with a noticeable logo of the brand; counterfeit with a noticeable logo of the brand)

Block. 3

Q.13 Please indicate your gender:

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/third gender
- Prefer not to say

Q.14 How old are you? _____

Q.15 What is your nationality? _____

Q.16 What is your education level? (Please choose the last one completed)

- Secondary School
- High School
- Bachelor Degree
- Master Degree
- Phd
- Other

Q.17 What is your monthly liquid disposable income (after taxes)?

- < 500 €
- 500-1000 €
- 1001-3000 €
- 3001-5000 €
- > 5000€
- I don't have a monthly income

Q.18 What is your current occupation?

- Student
- Worker-student
- Employed
- Self-employed
- Unemployed/retired

Chapter 7. References

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