



# Dupes versus Original Luxury Products: The Impact of Product Similarity and Opportunity Costs on Consumers' Purchase Behaviors and Perceptions

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## **Abstract**

The luxury market has grown steadily in recent years and is expected to continue to grow over the next five years (Statista, 2023b). However, not everyone who wants to consume luxury goods can afford them. As a result, there is a market for counterfeits and dupes. Unlike counterfeits, dupes (the short version of duplicates) are legal and particularly popular on social media. The impact of counterfeits on the economy, governments, and the original brand, as well as the reasons for consumers to buy counterfeits, have already been investigated. However, limited research about dupes exists in these areas.

This research focuses on the impact of the product similarity between the dupe and the original product on consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions and the moderating role of opportunity costs. The findings of an experimental study show that a high level of product similarity and a low level of opportunity costs lead to a greater willingness to pay. Perceptions about the dupes' quality also increase when faced with lower opportunity costs. However, results show that price perceptions and purchase intention for the dupe increase with higher opportunity costs. Consumers' status motive also influences the results. Furthermore, theoretical, and managerial implications are considered. These relate primarily to the marketing activities that brands should focus on for their various target groups.

**Keywords:** Luxury Products, Dupes, Purchase Behavior, Consumers' Perceptions, Product Similarity, Opportunity Costs

## **Resumo**

O mercado do luxo tem crescido de forma constante nos últimos anos e prevê-se que continue a crescer nos próximos cinco anos (Statista, 2023b). No entanto, nem toda a gente que quer consumir bens de luxo os pode comprar. Consequentemente, existe um mercado de contrafacções e falsificações. As imitações (versão abreviada de duplicados) são legais, ao contrário das contrafacções, e são particularmente populares nas redes sociais. O impacto das contrafacções na economia, nos governos e na marca original, bem como as razões que levam os consumidores a comprar contrafacções, já foram investigados. No entanto, não existe investigação sobre as falsificações nestes domínios.

Esta investigação centra-se no impacto da semelhança do produto entre a contrafação e o produto original nos comportamentos e perceções de compra dos consumidores, bem como no papel moderador dos custos de oportunidade. Os resultados de um estudo experimental mostram que um elevado nível de semelhança do produto e um baixo nível de custos de oportunidade conduzem a uma maior disponibilidade para pagar. As perceções sobre a qualidade do produto duplicado também aumentam quando os custos de oportunidade são mais baixos. No entanto, a a percepção do preço e intenção de compra aumentam quando os custos de oportunidade são mais elevados. . O motivo do estatuto dos consumidores também influencia os resultados. Além disso, são consideradas implicações teóricas e de gestão. Estas relacionam-se principalmente com as atividades de marketing em que as marcas se devem concentrar para os seus vários grupos-alvo.

**Palavras-chave:** Produtos de Luxo, Dupes, Comportamento de Compra, Perceções dos Consumidores, Semelhança de Produto, Custos de Oportunidade

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance

The luxury market grew steadily in the last years and is expected to grow 3.38% per year in the next five years (Statista, 2023b). The biggest luxury market segment is luxury fashion (including luxury apparel and footwear), with a market volume of \$111.50 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2023b). A prestigious luxury brand provides consumers with exceptional quality, workmanship, a highly engaging consumer experience, and exclusivity (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

But not everyone can afford to purchase luxury goods, which is why there is a market for counterfeits and dupes. According to a study by the OECD-EUIPO, the estimated volume of the market for counterfeiting in 2019 was \$464 billion. This is 2.5% of world trade and more than Portugal's GDP in 2019 (OECD & European Union Intellectual Property Office, 2021). Most counterfeit products are produced in China. Turkey is the most important producer of counterfeit leather goods and cosmetics shipped to the EU and is also the third most important manufacturer of counterfeit goods worldwide (OECD & European Union Intellectual Property Office, 2021). The three largest product categories for counterfeits are footwear, clothing, and leather goods and handbags. All these categories can also represent luxury products.

One problem of the counterfeit market is that it can seriously threaten consumers' health, safety, and the environment. This refers to counterfeits like food, toys, and chemicals, such as fertilizers or pesticides (OECD & European Union Intellectual Property Office, 2021). Besides these threats to consumers, the production and purchase of counterfeits are illegal (Perez et al., 2010). Counterfeiting also causes legitimate brand problems, such as revenue loss, and impacts the brand's reputation (OECD, 1998; Sularia, 2020). Furthermore, it has an impact on governments. They lose out on tax payments and incur costs to enforce intellectual property rights, and there is concern that the producers and sellers of counterfeits are also linked to other criminal activities, such as money laundering (OECD, 1998).

Previous research has focused on the reasons for buying counterfeits (e.g., Iyer et al., 2022; Sharma & Chan, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2009). However, to the author's knowledge, there is limited research on the role of dupes. Dupes – the short version of duplicate – are, in contrast to counterfeits legal (Roselius, 2023). They are a cheaper version of the original (luxury) good and, at best, let others think the consumer has bought a luxury product (Judkis, 2023). Dupes can be any designer product – A shoe with a red sole reminiscent of Louboutin, a leather-look

handbag in the design of the famous Hermes Birkin Bag, a suitcase in classic Rimowa style, a curling iron that looks like the Dyson Airwrap or headphones in the design of the Apple AirPods max. There are no limits to dupes.

The hashtag ‘dupe’ has 331,000 results on Instagram and 5.6 billion on TikTok (status October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023), and the hashtag ‘dupes’ has 226,000 results on Instagram and 3.2 billion on TikTok (status October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023). This means there is high popularity for this topic within two of the ten most used social media platforms (Statista, 2023a), which is another reason why this research is relevant.

Dupes pose the same problems for the original brand as counterfeits. However, dupes are not illegal. This can lead to consumers having fewer inhibitions about purchasing a dupe of a luxury product. Since dupes are very popular on social media and there is no apparent research about their impact, this study will examine the influence of dupes on consumers’ purchase behaviors and perceptions. Furthermore, consumers may face not only the financial aspect of choosing between the genuine product and the dupe but also the opportunity costs associated with their decision. By understanding the influence of these factors, more comprehensive insights into consumer behavior can be gained.

## **1.2 Objectives and Research Questions**

As the definition of dupes already describes, the similarity between the dupe and the original product is an essential aspect of dupes (Judkis, 2023). The perceived similarity between the counterfeit and the original product also plays an important role in the research of counterfeits (Wang et al., 2020). The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of the level of product similarity between the dupe and the original product on consumers’ purchase behaviors (purchase intention, willingness to pay, actual choice) and perceptions, namely perceptions about the product quality, price, and brand ethicality. By examining the impact of product similarity on consumers’ purchase behaviors and perceptions, conclusions can be drawn about consumer decision-making and management implications. As such the first research questions to be addressed is:

***RQ1: How does the product similarity of dupes influence consumers’ purchase behaviors and perceptions?***

Secondly, the influence of opportunity costs is important for this study. Consumers should consider opportunity costs in every purchasing decision (Spiller, 2011). By examining the influence level of opportunity costs on consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions, conclusions can be drawn about the importance of the price and maximum price of dupes. This leads to important implications for companies and managers. Hence, the second research question is as follows:

***RQ2: How do opportunity costs influence consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions?***

The product similarity between counterfeits and the original product as well as the price play a decisive role in consumers' decisions. Therefore, not only the independent effect of product similarity and opportunity cost on consumer purchase behaviors and perceptions is of interest, but also a possible interaction effect between these two variables.

***RQ3: How do opportunity costs influence the relationship between product similarity and consumers' purchase behaviors?***

### **1.3 Thesis Structure**

After the introduction, the second chapter provides a literature review and the relevant theoretical concepts concerning the topic. An explanation of the conceptual framework and the hypotheses follow. Furthermore, the fourth chapter describes the methodology of the study. Subsequently, the results of the study are analyzed. The sixth chapter contains a conclusion. Afterward, managerial, and theoretical implications follow, and finally, limitations of the work are discussed, and suggestions for future studies are given.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Counterfeit Goods**

Counterfeit goods are accurate copies of products that are usually of lower quality than the original product (Lai & Zaichkowsky, 1999). It is also any unauthorized manufacture or distribution of products that have special characteristics of the original product, thus violating intellectual property rights (Chaudhry & Stumpf, 2011). The manufacturer of counterfeits intends to deceive the customer and make him/her believe that he/she is purchasing an original product (Lai & Zaichkowsky, 1999).

Khan et al. (2021, p. 338) define counterfeiting from the consumers' point of view as: "the dynamic interplay between the motivational determinants, patterns, and outcomes of willful acquisition of counterfeit brands, which often serve consumers' ulterior motives of impressing and deceiving the observers".

In the literature, a distinction is made between deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeits. Deceptive counterfeits are those counterfeits that consumers cannot identify as counterfeits of the genuine brand (Grossman & Shapiro, 1988a). Thus, consumers mistakenly believe that they are buying an original product (Cordell et al., 1996). In contrast, when consuming non-deceptive counterfeits, the consumer is aware of the counterfeit. This type of counterfeiting often occurs with counterfeits of luxury goods, where consumers see enough evidence (worse quality, significantly lower price) that it is not a product of the genuine brand (Grossman & Shapiro, 1988b; Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000).

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) were applied in connection with counterfeiting. According to the TRA, attitudes and social norms determine consumers' behavioral intentions. Basu et al. (2015) found that the desire for counterfeit luxury brands depends on social motives. The more a consumer thinks that a product is a means of status and self-expression, the less likely they are to purchase a counterfeit. The TRA also shows that the perception of social norms determines whether a person should engage in a particular behavior. In the context of counterfeiting, this mainly concerns the financial risk and fear of penalties that some consumers experience. They perceive counterfeits as inferior products (Basu et al., 2015).

Kim and Karpova (2010) tested the TPB in connection with fashion counterfeiting. They found that the practice matches the theory. In the sense that the attitude towards buying counterfeits, the subjective norm and the perceived behavioral control positively influence the purchase intention. The subjective norm is the strongest predictor of purchase intention. They also found evidence that social pressure from others influences purchase intentions. This is greater than the influence of the consumer's attitude towards the behavior.

### **The Reasons Why Consumers Purchase Counterfeit Goods**

The main reason for the consumption of counterfeit products is the lower price (e.g., Khan et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2010). Consumers want to get the prestige and social image given by a luxury product without paying the price (Bloch et al., 1993). As a result, they are not only

satisfied with their purchase but some also tend to feel superior to consumers of original products while impressing others (Perez et al., 2010).

Besides the lower price, there are many other reasons for consuming counterfeits. These include social motives such as status, social acceptance, image, impressing others, and hedonic needs (Jiang & Cova, 2012; Phau et al., 2009; Phau & Teah, 2009; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). Wilcox et al. (2009) found that consumers who buy a counterfeit because of the image are more likely to buy a product with a visible logo. They also found that the type of attitude toward the authentic brand impacted the preference for counterfeits and subsequent negative changes in preferences for the authentic brand. Specifically, the preference change is greater when social adjustment rather than value-expression functions characterize attitudes toward the authentic brand. These negative effects can lead to a loss of sales and long-term erosion of brand value.

Additionally, internal motives, which include fashion/novelty seeking, a sense of adventure, and quality acceptance, also explain why consumers purchase counterfeits (Thaichon & Quach, 2016).

Although the consumption of counterfeit goods is illegal, some consumers perceive it as fun and harmless (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000; Perez et al., 2010). However, the perceived risk has a negative impact on consumer attitudes toward counterfeit brands (Michaelidou & Christodoulides, 2011). The influence of the opinion of close people can also influence the consumption of counterfeits. Purchases can be prevented if potential buyers think that family or friends do not support the consumption of counterfeits (Kim & Karpova, 2010).

Furthermore, Wee et al. (1995) found that, especially for fashion and fashion-related products, the similarity between the counterfeits and the original products is very important for the product's appearance, quality, and image projected by the counterfeit.

If the product is found to be counterfeit, there are emotional consequences, such as embarrassment or shame, that cannot be undone. Some consumers intentionally disclose that they are wearing a counterfeit product. Reasons for this are an improved self-image, which is shown through expert knowledge about counterfeits, and unconventional behavior (Bian et al., 2016).

## **2.2 Status Motive**

Status can be described as a type of power that involves respect, consideration, and envy on the part of others. To improve their self-esteem, they project an image of themselves, express their

emotions and thoughts, and create social connections they want; consumers buy, possess, use, and show specific things (Eastman et al., 1999). There are three types of status: status by definition, status by achievement, and status by consumption (Eastman et al., 1999; Hayakawa, 1966). In this thesis, only status by consumption is relevant.

Status consumption is defined as the “tendency to purchase goods and services for the status or social prestige” (Eastman et al., 1999, p. 41). Consumers may want to purchase goods to gain the status that the product confers on the consumer in other peoples’ eyes. This desire is independent of consumers’ income or social class. Therefore, there can be a connection between certain brands’ popularity and the prestige they convey to their owners. Consumers, however, differ in their desire to obtain prestige through the consumption of status goods (Eastman et al., 1999). Iyer et al. (2022) found that status consumers like luxury but are also attracted to counterfeits to satisfy their need for status. Furthermore, research on counterfeits found a correlation between the status level and the price, as well as the quality (Eastman & Eastman, 2011). This is why a potential effect of status motive will be investigated.

### **2.3 Perceived Product Similarity**

The perceived product similarity plays an important role when purchasing counterfeits or dupes. Consumers want them to have a high similarity so that others may think the product is an original luxury product (Wang et al., 2020).

The perceived similarity is the extent to which a consumer thinks that two different objects look similar (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). Product similarity has three physical dimensions: durability, quality, and appearance. Within the present research context, appearance is the most important attribute (Wee et al., 1995). As such, perceived product similarity in this study refers to appearance.

Miceli and Pieters (2010) study on the perceived similarity between copycats and leading brands showed that similarity is not an objective, homogeneous construct and that perceived similarity depends on similarity (e.g., attributes or themes) and consumer mentality. Penz and Stöttinger (2008) found that perceived similarity is a key driver to purchase counterfeits in European countries and that consumers’ intention to purchase counterfeits is influenced by corporate image and perceived similarity.

According to Walsh and Mitchell (2005), there are four reasons for perceived product similarity: (1) a retailer imitates the pioneer brand of the manufacturer; (2) another manufacturer imitates

the pioneer brand of the manufacturer; (3) a manufacturer imitates the pioneer brand of the retailer; and (4) a retailer imitates the pioneer brand of another retailer.

Previous research on counterfeits has shown that the product similarity between the original and counterfeit products plays a central role in the consumers' decision-making process (Wee et al., 1995). Understanding the influence of product similarity may also play a central role in research on dupes, which is why this is precisely what this study investigates.

## **2.4 Opportunity Costs**

Consumers have numerous desires but limited resources (e.g., time and money). As a result, they have to make trade-offs, which leads to the concept of opportunity costs (Haghpour et al., 2022). Opportunity costs are defined as the costs of a lost benefit resulting from the decision favoring an alternative (Becker et al., 1974).

According to the economic literature, consumers should always factor opportunity costs into their decisions. However, the psychological literature shows otherwise (Spiller, 2011). That is, opportunity costs are often neglected by consumers (Frederick et al., 2009; Northcraft & Neale, 1986). Consumers only focus on the details explicitly presented, but to evaluate opportunity costs, they must also consider external options that are not explicitly part of their purchase decision. Trying to overcome the neglect is usually insufficient, but a reminder (e.g., explicit presentation of opportunity costs) may be a way forward to overcome the neglect (Frederick et al., 2009; Northcraft & Neale, 1986). For instance, opportunity costs are taken into account by consumers when they are confronted with resource scarcity conditions or use resources with a limited lifetime use (Spiller, 2011).

Moreover, Spiller (2011) also investigated who considers opportunity costs. According to his research findings, consumers with a high tendency to plan the future use of their money are more likely to consider opportunity costs. Consumers who consider opportunity costs are also more sensitive to their value than consumers who do not.

Literature found that consumers try to save money when consuming material goods and therefore opt for the cheaper option (Chatterjee et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies revealed that by introducing opportunity costs, the choice for the cheaper product increased and the purchase intention decreases, when only one option was presented (Bartels & Urminsky, 2015; Frederick et al., 2009). When opportunity costs are high, consumers tend to overweight them and vice versa (Hoskin, 1983).

Opportunity costs shape consumers' behavior and decision-making. However, economic principles and psychological reality do not always coincide. This study therefore examines the relationship between opportunity costs and consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions.

## **2.5 Consumers' Purchase Behaviors**

Consumers' purchase behavior is a process of selecting, buying and selling goods based on consumer needs and desires (Dudovskiy, 2013). In this study, consumers' purchase behaviors include their purchase intention, willingness to pay, and their actual choice.

Purchase intention is an action tendency in relation to a brand. It is "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 56). Research on counterfeits has shown that price and quality are the two most important factors contributing to purchase intention (Hamelin et al., 2013). When the quality between the counterfeit and the original brand is similar, the purchase intention will be higher (Wee et al., 1995). Phau and Teah (2009) found that the perceptions of counterfeits influence consumers more than ethical and legal factors. Among other things, status consumption is one of the two most important factors influencing consumer purchase intention. Consumers who search for status have a higher purchase intention than non-status-seeking consumers (Phau & Teah, 2009). Another important finding is that the similarities in appearance, quality, and image are important for the purchase intention of fashion or fashion-related products (Wee et al., 1995).

Willingness to pay is defined as the highest price that a consumer is willing to pay for a certain quantity of products or services (Le Gall-Ely, 2009). Previous research in the context of counterfeits found that consumers' willingness to pay for the original product decreases when counterfeits exist, especially for lesser-known brands. However, if consumers want to purchase luxury products for status or to stand out, their willingness to pay increases. In addition, it was found that consumers appreciate the high quality of luxury products and are thus willing to pay more for the original product (Romani et al., 2012).

Unlike the purchase intention, the actual choice is not the plan of a purchase, but the final decision for a product or brand. The previous research about counterfeits and consumers' actual choice found a positive correlation between the price of the original product and the choice of the counterfeit (Harvey & Walls, 2003).

## 2.6 Perceptions about Dupes

### 2.6.1 *Perceived Product Quality*

Quality is a form of overall evaluation of the product (Olshavsky, 1985). It can generally be defined as excellence and refers to meeting or exceeding consumers' expectations (Snoj et al., 2004; Zeithaml, 1988). Beneke et al. (2016, p. 219) defined perceived product quality as "the way in which a customer views a product's brand equity and overall superiority compared to the available alternatives". Perceived quality is the consumer's opinion of the degree to which their expectations are satisfied (Mobil et al., 2019). Customers evaluate product quality based on performance, level of manufacturing standard, and product-specific characteristics (Agarwal & Teas, 2004). In addition, consumers assume that a higher price means higher quality (Mobil et al., 2019). In comparison, objective quality means the actual superiority of the product (Zeithaml, 1988).

In general, counterfeits have a lower product quality than the original product (Lai & Zaichkowsky, 1999). Previous research on counterfeits found that for fashion and fashion-related counterfeits, quality is beyond others very important for consumers (Wee et al., 1995).

According to the consumer decision-making literature (e.g., Basu et al., 2015; Mobil et al., 2019; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Zeithaml, 1988), a series of attributes accompany choice evaluations, namely perceived product price and brand ethicality, as reviewed next.

### 2.6.2 *Perceived Product Price*

One reason consumers purchase dupes is that they are lower priced than the original luxury product (e.g., Khan et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2010). From the consumers' point of view, "price is what is given up or sacrificed to obtain a product" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 10). There are three elements of price: objective price, perceived price, and sacrifice. The objective price is the actual genuine price of the product. The perceived price, however, is the price as understood by the consumer (Zeithaml, 1988). When evaluating the price, the consumer refers to the ratio between the price of the product and the price of substitutable products (Jacoby et al., 1971). There is often a distinction between these two prices. This means some consumers remember the actual price of a product, others only their individual evaluation of the price (expensive or cheap), and others do not remember any prices at all (Zeithaml, 1988). Therefore, the price perception of consumers is important because it is one of the most important elements of information for the consumer when making a purchase decision and represents an extrinsic incentive (Ralston, 2003; Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007).

### *2.6.3 Perceived Brand Ethicality*

Previous literature on counterfeiting has examined the ethics of consumers in relation to their decision-making and purchasing intentions (Basu et al., 2015; Penz & Stottinger, 2005; Phau et al., 2009). Ethical judgment relates to a person's perceptions about the moral rightness or wrongness of a particular behavior (Ha & Lennon, 2006).

Consuming counterfeit goods is illegal, presents moral and ethical dilemmas, and is often regarded as unethical consumption (Garcia-Ruiz & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2014; Penz & Stottinger, 2005). One reason for these ethical dilemmas is that counterfeits weaken the reputation of the legitimate company (Ha & Lennon, 2006). Studies have shown that consumers with a high level of morality are less likely to buy counterfeits (e.g., Basu et al., 2015; Ha & Lennon, 2006). In addition, Wee et al. (1995) found that consumers who want to belong to a higher class but do not have the income to do so are more likely to buy counterfeits, regardless of their moral beliefs. To justify the consumption of counterfeits, they blame the sellers by claiming they have been cheated (Phau et al., 2009).

Consumers' perceived brand ethicality can be defined as "perception of the brand as being honest, responsible, and accountable toward various stakeholders" (Singh et al., 2012, p. 543).

As research points to the influence of consumers' ethics on their intention to buy counterfeits, it will most likely affect consumers' perceived brand ethicality of brands that sell dupes. Therefore, consumers' perceptions of brand ethicality toward dupes will also be empirically investigated in this research.

## **3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

The literature review serves as the basis for a set of hypotheses placed in a conceptual framework. This framework aims to illustrate the hypothesized effects that will later be tested in an experimental study.

As mentioned before, perceived product similarity is very important for consumers when purchasing counterfeits. Previous research on counterfeits has found that the more similar the counterfeit and the original product are, the more likely consumers are to purchase the counterfeit (Tom et al., 1998; Wang et al., 2020). Regarding willingness to pay, consumers who appreciate high quality and want to stand out with the purchase of a luxury product are willing to pay more (Romani et al., 2012). This could indicate that high product similarity also leads to

a higher willingness to pay for the dupe. To examine the relationship between dupes and the original products, the first hypothesis is formally presented as:

***H1:*** The perceived product similarity between the dupe and the original product will influence consumers' purchase behaviors and product perceptions.

***H1a:*** Consumers will have a higher (vs. lower) purchase intention and willingness to pay for the dupe when product similarity is high (vs. low).

***H1b:*** Consumers will likely choose the dupe (vs. the original product) when product similarity is high (vs. low).

Walsh and Mitchell (2005) found that consumers who are susceptible to product similarity tend to believe that products within a certain product category are often of the same quality. When a dupe is highly similar to an original product (from the same product category), it is hypothesized that consumers will evaluate dupes more positively than when product similarity is lower.

***H1c:*** Consumers will have a higher (vs. lower) quality perception of the dupe when product similarity is high (vs. low).

Another finding of the literature on counterfeits is that the main reason for consuming them is their lower price (Khan et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2010). Research in this domain indicates that a high perceived product similarity also positively influences the perceived price. This means that the higher the perceived product similarity, the more likely a higher price is perceived as justified.

***H1d:*** Consumers will perceive a higher (vs. lower) price for the dupe as justified when product similarity is high (vs. low).

Since dupes are legal duplicates of luxury products, the duplicate brand may be perceived by consumers as taking advantage by copying another brand's intellectual property, such as its design. As such, it can be hypothesized that consumers are likely to perceive the dupe brand as not ethical in a strict sense of the term since it infringed the original brand's intellectual

property rights to a certain extent (Singh et al., 2012). As such, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**H1e:** Consumers will have a lower (vs. higher) brand ethicality perception toward the dupe when product similarity is high (vs. low).

Research about opportunity costs found that consumers prefer the cheaper option when the price difference is explicitly mentioned (Frederick et al., 2009) and that consumers' intention to purchase decreases when they are reminded of the opportunity costs (Plantinga et al., 2018). Frederick et al. (2009) also found that if consumers are aware of opportunity costs, they are less likely to purchase the product. This suggests that higher opportunity costs lead to higher purchase behaviors for the cheaper option. More formally, the second set of hypotheses is proposing as follows:

**H2:** Opportunity cost differences between the dupe and the original product will influence consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions.

**H2a:** Consumers will have higher (vs. lower) purchase behaviors (purchase intention, willingness to pay, actual choice) for the dupe when opportunity costs are high (vs. low).

**H2b:** Consumers will have higher (vs. lower) quality and brand ethicality perceptions of the dupe when opportunity costs are low (vs. high) but will perceive a higher (vs. lower) price justification of the dupe when opportunity costs are high (vs. low).

Previous research on counterfeiting identifies product similarity and price as two important aspects in the decision to buy a counterfeit (Khan et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2020; Wee et al., 1995). In the context of the present research about dupes it is also expected that it should help understand the moderating role of external factors (opportunity costs) on the relationship between product characteristics (product similarity) and purchasing behaviors. Therefore, the third hypothesis is suggested as follows:

**H3:** The impact of product similarity on purchase behaviors will be moderated by opportunity costs, such that:

**H3a:** When opportunity costs are low, product similarity has a stronger positive (vs. weaker positive) impact on purchase behaviors (purchase intention, willingness to pay) than when opportunity costs are high.

The study’s main purpose is to understand the influence of perceived product similarity on consumers’ purchase behaviors (purchase intention, willingness to pay, and actual choice) and perceptions (quality, price, and brand ethicality perceptions) as well as the impact of opportunity costs. Status motive will be tested as a covariate.

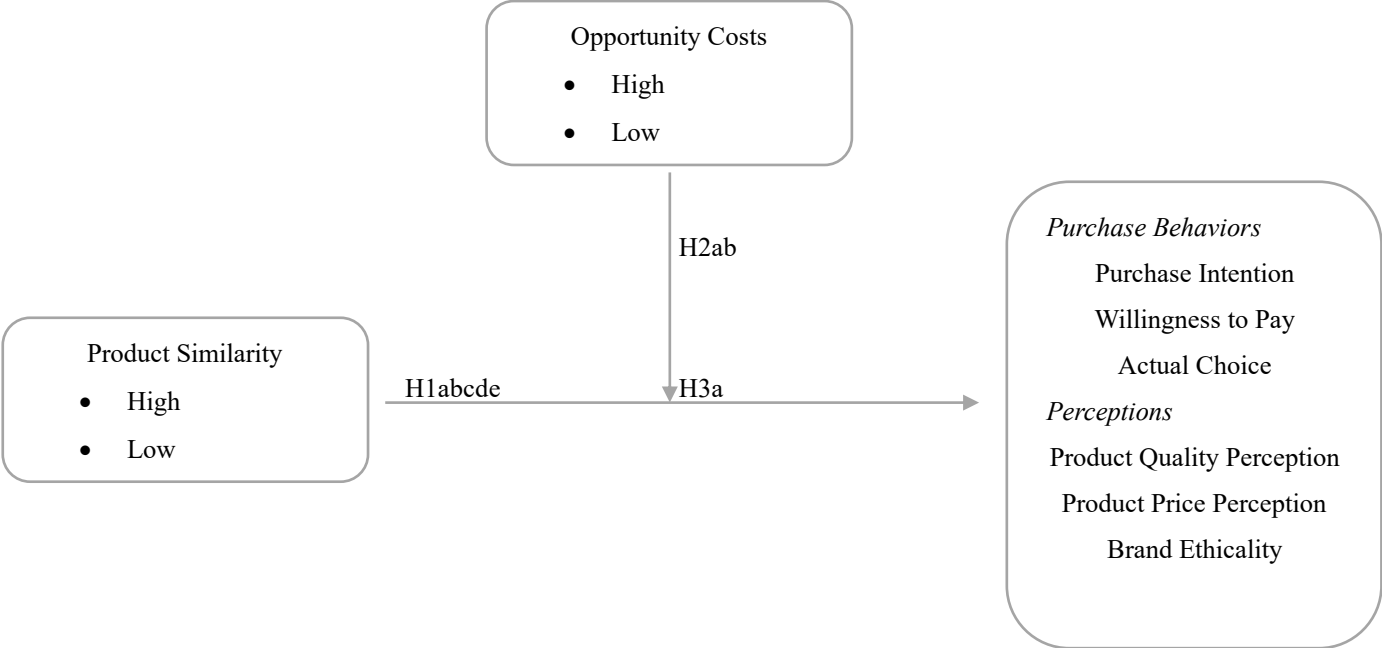


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

**4. Methodology**

**4.1 Research Method**

Two experimental studies were the foundation for the research: a pre-test and a main study. The data was collected through an online survey using the web-based platform Qualtrics. This online platform allows users to obtain data quickly and inexpensively. It is also a very participant-friendly platform since there are no limitations on time or location to complete the survey. This enables the collection of a wide range of data. Qualtrics also offers many options to customize the survey to the research objectives. For example, there is a tool that randomizes the questions.

**4.2 Sampling**

A non-probability convenience sample was used as sampling method. It was chosen because a specific theoretical issue is being investigated that cannot yet be generalized for the general

population. This method has the advantage of being easier and cheaper to conduct. However, it has a higher risk of biases, which could influence the results. Thus, the participants are likely to come from the author's network, as the survey was shared via their social media platforms.

### **4.3 Research Instruments**

#### *4.3.1 Pre-test*

Before the main study was conducted, a pre-test was carried out. The reason for this test was to test the functionality of the survey and to uncover potential ambiguities. In addition, the pretest was used to determine whether the manipulation met the performance expectations and whether the survey procedure could be adopted for the test conditions in the main study.

A total of 24 responses were collected. Manipulation checks were conducted for the levels of product similarity and opportunity costs. Results showed that the manipulation works and was adopted for the main study ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.76$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 7$ ,  $SD = 0$ ,  $t(12) = -5.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $M_{\text{lowOC}} = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.27$  vs.  $M_{\text{highOC}} = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ,  $t(18.78) = -4.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

#### *4.3.2 Main Study*

The main study was published in English and shared via social media platforms (such as Instagram and WhatsApp). A total of 293 responses were obtained, of which 201 were completed and thus analyzed.

Participants were randomly exposed to one of four different scenarios via the randomization function in Qualtrics. Each condition had approximately 50 responses, which is a reasonable number of participants to conduct an experimental research study.

### **4.4 Design and Procedure**

The data was gathered between November 17 and November 30, 2023. The study's main purpose is to investigate the influence of product similarity between the dupe and the original product on consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions. Primary data was gathered to test the developed hypotheses and to respond to the study objectives.

The study design followed a 2 (level of product similarity: high vs. low) x 2 (level of opportunity costs: high vs. low) between-within-subject design. Participants were randomly exposed to one of four possible manipulations (see Table 1).

Manipulation	Level of Product Similarity		Level of Opportunity Costs	
	High	Low	High	Low
1	X		X	
2	X			X
3		X	X	
4		X		X

*Table 1: Manipulation Scenarios*

After a short introduction text, participants were first asked about their status motive when shopping. To achieve this, they had to indicate their level of agreement with five statements, based on Eastman et al. (1999).

To investigate the influence of product similarity on the dependent variables, participants were exposed to two different levels of product similarity (high vs. low). A dupe product, the focal point of the research, was assigned a high and a low price to investigate the influence of opportunity costs. A high price reflects low opportunity costs, and a low price reflects high opportunity costs. In order to prevent the position in which the products were presented from influencing the participants, the placement of the products was counter-balanced (right vs. left side).

The participants were then exposed to one of four possible manipulation scenarios. The introductory scenario was the same in every manipulation. The participants were asked to imagine that they wanted to purchase a cabin luggage, and their budget was €1,200. What they would not spend from this budget, they would keep. Then, they were exposed to one of the four pictures part of the manipulation scenarios. Each picture showed two products (original product and dupe product) with the respective brand, price, and a short description. The real brand was used to represent the original product, and a fictitious one to represent the dupe product. The product description was the same for both products (Appendix 1).

After being exposed to one of the manipulations, participants were asked to answer two questions that were used as manipulation checks.

Then, participants were asked about the dupe's perceived price and perceived quality, as well as their willingness to pay and purchase intention for both products. Questions were also asked about their actual choice. Furthermore, a series of questions were asked about the perceived

brand ethicality of the dupe brand (Brunk, 2012). Finally, participants were asked to provide their demographics and thanked for participating (Appendix 2).

## **4.5 Variables Description**

### *4.5.1 Manipulation Check*

*Product Similarity:* to evaluate the effectiveness of the manipulation regarding the product similarity, participants were asked to indicate their opinion about how similar the products were, on a 7-point-Likert scale (1 – not similar at all, 7 – very similar).

*Opportunity Costs:* to evaluate the effectiveness of the manipulation regarding the opportunity costs, participants were asked to indicate their opinion about the price difference between the products, on a 7-point-Likert scale (1 – extremely low, 7 – extremely high).

### *4.5.2 Independent Variable*

*Product Similarity:* high versus low similarity; manipulated and randomly presented to participants, who were exposed to either a dupe or an original luxury product, both with high or low similarity.

### *4.5.3 Moderator*

*Opportunity Costs:* high versus low; participants were exposed to a scenario with two products at different prices and a budget. The price difference was either high or low, resulting in high or low opportunity costs. The high opportunity costs were €680 and the low ones €180. The price of the original product was based on the real price.

### *4.5.4 Control Variable*

*Status Motive:* participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements on a seven-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree) adapted from Eastman et al. (1999).

#### 4.5.5 *Dependent Variables*

*Purchase Intention:* participants were asked to indicate their purchase intention for the original product and the dupe on a seven-point Likert scale (1 – extremely unlikely, 7 – extremely likely).

*Willingness to Pay:* to examine this variable, participants were asked to indicate what they would pay for the original product and the dupe, using the slider function (on a scale from €0 to €1,200).

*Actual Choice:* participants were asked which of the two products presented they would choose to purchase.

*Perceived Product Quality:* to assess this variable, participants were asked to indicate how good they think the quality of the dupe would be compared to the original product on a seven-point Likert scale (1 – much worse, 7 – much better).

*Perceived Product Price:* this variable was assessed by asking the participants to indicate their level of agreement with three statements on a seven-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree).

*Perceived Brand Ethicality:* participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with four statements (e.g., “the brand respects moral laws”, “the brand is a good brand”) about the dupes’ brand ethicality on a seven-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree) adapted from Brunk (2012).

## **5 Analysis and Results**

### **5.1 Sample Characterization**

In the final section of the survey, participants were asked to answer demographic questions. This serves to obtain an accurate portrait of the sample (Appendix 3). The final sample consisted

of 201 participants, 104 of whom were female (51.7%), 92 male (45.8%) and 3 non-binary (1.5%). 2 participants (1%) preferred not to provide any information.

Most of the participants were between 21 and 29 years old (62.2%). 14.9% were between 30 and 39 years old, 10.4% were between 18 and 21 years old, followed by 6.5% who were between 50 and 59 years old. Only 3% were between 40 and 49 years old, 2.5% 60 and older, and only one participant was under 18 (0.5%).

Most of the participants came from Germany (74.6%). The remaining participants came from Portugal, Poland, South Africa, the USA, England, Italy, and Austria, among others.

The participants were also asked about their highest educational qualification and their profession. The majority of all respondents have a bachelor's degree (45.8%), followed by a high school degree (27.4%) and a master's degree (21.9%). Only 3.5% have less than a high school degree, 1.0% have a professorial degree and only 0.5% have a doctoral degree.

In terms of occupation, 39.3% work full-time, 22.9% are Master's students, 18.9% are Bachelor's students and 7% are working students and work part-time. Only 3% are unemployed, 1.5% are high school students and 0.5% are retired.

Finally, they were also asked about their annual income (before tax). 18 respondents did not wish to provide any information. Of the remaining respondents, most stated that they earn less than €10,000 (27.9%), followed by 21.4% who earn between €10,000 and €19,999. 10.4% stated that they earn between €50,000 and €74,999, 9.5% between €40,000 and €49,999 and 7.5% between €20,000 and €29,999. The remaining respondents had incomes of between €75,000 and €99,999 (4.5%), €100,000 and €150,000 (4%), €30,000 and €39,999 (3.5%) and finally an income of more than €150,000 (2.5%).

## **5.2 Scales Reliability**

Even though the scales used in the present study were adopted from the literature, it is necessary to test the scale reliability to guarantee the most accurate results.

A factor analysis with a varimax rotation was conducted to examine the scales of the variables with three or more items (status motive, brand ethicality). Only one component was extracted for each variable. After the factor analysis, an additional reliability analysis was carried out to assess the Cronbach's alpha (Table 2).

	Initial Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha if deleted	Items deleted	Final Number of Items
Status Motive	5	.489	.866	1	4
Brand Ethicality	4	.854	.836	-	4

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha for Status Motive, Brand Ethicality

The alpha of status motive is lower than .60, which is considered unacceptable ( DeVellis, 1991), but can be optimized by deleting the item "The status of a product is irrelevant to me". Hence, the item was deleted from the scale, and the status motive variable was modified, being now composed of items 1 to 3 and 5. The alpha of brand ethicality is higher than .80, which is considered very good ( DeVellis, 1991).

The price variable consisted of three questions. However, as it is only relevant for the hypothesis whether the participants considered the price of the dupe to be justified, only the question on the perception of price justification ("The price for product B is justified") will be used for the variable price in the following.

### 5.3 Manipulation Check Results

To analyze if the product similarity manipulation was successful, an independent samples *t-test* at a 95% confidence level was conducted (Table 3), which showed a significant relationship between both products. The products of the manipulation with low product similarity were perceived as less similar than the products of the manipulation with high product similarity ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 1.64$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 6.40$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ;  $t(166) = -5.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which validates the manipulation.

	Low PS		High PS		<i>t-test</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Manipulation Check	5.23	1.64	6.40	1.08	-5.91***

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

Table 3: Independent Samples *t-test* Product Similarity (PS) Manipulation Check

The same procedure was used to analyze the opportunity costs manipulation (Table 4) and showed a significant relationship between both products. The product prices of the manipulation with low opportunity costs (meaning a lower price difference between the products) were perceived as lower than the prices of the manipulation with high opportunity costs (meaning a higher price difference between the products) ( $M_{\text{lowOC}} = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 1.36$  vs.  $M_{\text{highOC}} = 5.98$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ;  $t(181) = -11.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which validates the manipulation.

	Low OC		High OC		<i>t-test</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Manipulation Check	3.92	1.36	5.98	1.06	-11.94***

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

Table 4: Independent Samples *t-test*: Opportunity Costs (OC) Manipulation Check

## 5.4 Main Results

### 5.4.1 The Effect of Product Similarity on Consumers' Purchase Behaviors and Perceptions

**H1:** The perceived product similarity between the dupe and the original product will influence consumers' purchase behaviors and product perceptions.

**H1a:** Consumers will have a higher (vs. lower) purchase intention and willingness to pay for the dupe when product similarity is high (vs. low).

To test the first hypothesis a paired samples *t-test* was conducted (Table 5).

	Low PS			High PS		
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
Purchase Intention A	2.92	1.98		2.85	1.95	
Purchase Intention B	3.03	1.90		3.27	1.86	
WTP A	435.71	304.40		488.50	304.62	
WTP B	302.45	214.53		355.71	223.91	
	Mean	SD	<i>t-test</i>	Mean	SD	<i>t-test</i>
Purchase Intention A – Purchase Intention B	-.11	2.44	-.46	-.42	2.61	-1.62
WTP A – WTP B	133.27	279.25	4.72***	132.80	260.24	5.18***

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

For a better clarification, Product A is the original brand, Product B is the dupe

Table 5: Paired Samples *t*-test: Product Similarity (PS) on Purchase Intention, WTP

The results show that consumers' willingness to pay has a statistically significant difference between the two products. Comparing the means of willingness to pay, it is higher for the original product ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 435.71$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 488.50$ ) than for the dupe ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 302.45$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 355.71$ ). Meaning that consumers are generally willing to pay more for the original product than for the dupe. The mean difference is significant for consumers' willingness to pay for products with low product similarity ( $M_{\text{WTPA}} = 435.71$  vs.  $M_{\text{WTPB}} = 302.45$ ,  $t(97) = 4.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and significant for products with high product similarity ( $M_{\text{WTPA}} = 488.51$  vs.  $M_{\text{WTPB}} = 355.71$ ,  $t(102) = 5.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results show that participants are willing to pay more for the original product and the dupe when product similarity is high. There is no statistically significant difference between the two products for consumers' purchase intention when product similarity is low ( $M_{\text{Purchase-IntentionA}} = 2.92$  vs.  $M_{\text{Purchase-IntentionB}} = 3.03$ ,  $t(97) = -.46$ ,  $p > .6$ , NS) and when product similarity is high ( $M_{\text{Purchase-IntentionA}} = 2.85$  vs.  $M_{\text{Purchase-IntentionB}} = 3.27$ ,  $t(102) = -1.62$ ,  $p > .1$ , NS).

The results partially support H1a, given that only willingness to pay is significantly affected by product similarity.

To control for the influence of consumers' status motive on the purchase decision of counterfeits, an additional effect was also suspected in connection with dupes, which was further investigated. Therefore, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance with status motive

as covariate (MANCOVA) was performed. The results show no significant changes in purchase intention for the dupe ( $F(1) = .67, p < .5, NS$ ). However, there is a significant main effect on purchase intention for the original product ( $F(1) = 24.01, p < .001$ ), on willingness to pay for the original product ( $F(1) = 36.48, p < .001$ ), and on willingness to pay for the dupe ( $F(1) = 6.35, p < .05$ ). These results indicate that participants with different levels of status motive made different assessments for their willingness to pay for both products and their purchase intention for the original product.

**H1b:** Consumers will likely choose the dupe (vs. the original product) when product similarity is high (vs. low).

To test hypothesis H1b, a chi-square test was performed to observe the impact of product similarity on consumers' choice (Table 6).

	Low PS		High PS		Chi-square
	Product A	Product B	Product A	Product B	
Actual Choice	28.60%	71.40%	29.10%	70.90%	.008

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

For a better clarification, Product A is the original Brand, Product B is the dupe

Table 6: Chi-square: Product Similarity (PS) on Actual Choice

Comparing the percentages of participants' actual choice, when participants were exposed to high product similarity instead of low product similarity, the actual choice of the dupe was slightly lower (71.40% vs. 70.90%), despite not being statistically significant ( $p > .5, NS$ ). The results therefore lead to a rejection of hypothesis H1b, as there is no significant difference in actual consumer choice when product similarity is high.

In a second step, an ANCOVA with status motive as a covariate was conducted. The results show a statistically significant main effect of status motive on the actual choice ( $F(1) = 21.61, p < .001$ ). This indicates that actual choice is also influenced by status motive. It means that participants with different levels of status motive have chosen different products.

**H1c:** Consumers will have a higher (vs. lower) quality perception of the dupe when product similarity is high (vs. low).

**H1d:** Consumers will perceive a higher (vs. lower) price for the dupe as justified when product similarity is high (vs. low).

**H1e:** Consumers will have a lower (vs. higher) brand ethicality perception toward the dupe when product similarity is high (vs. low).

To test the impact of product similarity between the original product and the dupe on consumers' perceptions, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted (Table 7).

	Low PS		High PS		<i>F-test</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Perceived Product Quality	3.63	.85	3.55	.871	.42
Perceived Product Price	3.28	1.45	3.49	1.51	1.01
Perceived Brand Ethicality	3.96	.80	3.94	.70	.06

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

Table 7: One-way MANOVA: Product Similarity (PS) on Consumers' Perceptions

The results show a non-significant main effect on perceived product quality ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 3.63$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 3.55$ ,  $F(1,199) = .42$ ,  $p > .5$ , NS), perceived product price ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 3.28$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 3.49$ ,  $F(1,199) = 1.01$ ,  $p > .3$ , NS), and perceived brand ethicality ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 3.96$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 3.94$ ,  $F(1,199) = .06$ ,  $p > .8$ , NS). Therefore, H1cde are rejected, meaning there is no significant main effect of product similarity on consumers' perceptions about the dupe.

Similarly to H1ab, a MANCOVA with status motive as a covariate was performed. The results show a significant main effect for perceived product quality ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 3.63$  vs  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 3.55$ ,  $F(1) = 11.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that the perceived product quality is significantly influenced by status motive. Furthermore, it means that participants with different status motive levels assessed perceived product quality differently. It suggests that individual differences in status motive are associated with varying perceptions of product quality. There are no significant changes in perceived product price ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 3.28$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 3.49$ ,  $F(1) = 2.13$ ,

$p > .1$ , NS) and perceived brand ethicality ( $M_{\text{lowPS}} = 3.96$  vs.  $M_{\text{highPS}} = 3.94$ ,  $F(1) = .55$ ,  $p > .4$ , NS).

#### 5.4.2 *The Effect of Opportunity Costs on Consumers' Purchase Behaviors and Perceptions*

**H2:** Opportunity cost differences between the dupe and the original product will influence consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions.

**H2a:** Consumers will have higher (vs. lower) purchase behaviors (purchase intention, willingness to pay, actual choice) for the dupe when opportunity costs are high (vs. low).

To test the impact of opportunity costs on purchase intention and willingness to pay a paired samples *t-test* (Table 8) and to test the impact on actual choice a chi-square test (Table 9) was performed.

	Low OC			High OC		
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
Purchase Intention A	3.02	1.96		2.76	1.96	
Purchase Intention B	2.57	1.57		3.70	1.98	
WTP A	492.85	333.50		434.71	274.34	
WTP B	361.68	245.12		299.95	191.13	
	Mean	SD	<i>t-test</i>	Mean	SD	<i>t-test</i>
Purchase Intention A – Purchase Intention B	.45	1.96	2.28	-.94	2.81	-3.42***
WTP A – WTP B	131.26	248.29	5.20***	134.76	288.16	4.77***

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

For a better clarification, Product A is the original brand, Product B is the dupe

Table 8: Paired Samples *t-test*: Opportunity Costs (OC) on Purchase Intention, WTP

For purchase intention, the results indicate a statistically significant difference for both products. Comparing the means show that consumers have a higher purchase intention for the original product when opportunity costs are low ( $M_{\text{Purchase-IntentionA}} = 3.02$  vs.  $M_{\text{Purchase-IntentionB}} = 2.57$ ,  $t(96) = 2.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and a higher purchase intention for the dupe when opportunity costs are high ( $M_{\text{Purchase-IntentionA}} = 2.76$  vs.  $M_{\text{Purchase-IntentionB}} = 3.70$ ,  $t(103) = -3.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Meaning that when opportunity costs are low, results show a lower price difference between the products, consequently consumers are more likely to purchase the original product. Alternatively, when

opportunity costs are high, results indicate a higher price difference between the products, resulting in consumers being more likely to purchase the dupe.

The results indicate further that there is a statistically significant difference between consumers' willingness to pay for the two different products. Findings suggest consumers are willing to pay more for both products (original and dupe) when opportunity costs are low than high. Yet, they are willing to pay more for the original product in general, as witnessed by statistically significant effect ( $M_{WTPA-lowOC} = 492.85$  vs.  $M_{WTPB-lowOC} = 361.68$ ,  $t(96) = 5.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $M_{WTPA-highOC} = 434.71$  vs.  $M_{WTPB-highOC} = 299.95$ ,  $t(103) = 4.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

	Low OC		High OC		Chi-square
	Product A	Product B	Product A	Product B	
Actual Choice	33%	67%	25%	75%	1.56

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

For a better clarification, Product A is the original Brand, Product B the dupe

Table 9: Chi-square: Opportunity Costs (OC) on Actual Choice

Comparing the percentages of participants' actual choice, when participants were exposed to high opportunity costs instead of low opportunity costs, the actual choice of the dupe was higher (67% vs. 75%), despite a statistically non-significant effect ( $p > .05$ , NS), partially validating H2a.

Overall findings suggest that opportunity costs tend to impact consumers' purchase behaviors for the dupe despite a non-significant effect on actual choice.

**H2b:** Consumers will have higher (vs. lower) quality and brand ethicality perceptions of the dupe when opportunity costs are low (vs. high) but will perceive a higher (vs. lower) price justification of the dupe when opportunity costs are high (vs. low).

In order to investigate the influence of opportunity costs on consumer perceptions, a one-way MANOVA (Table 10) was carried out.

	Low OC		High OC		<i>F-test</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Perceived Product Quality	3.77	.69	3.42	.97	8.60**
Perceived Product Price	2.91	1.30	3.83	1.51	21.28***
Perceived Brand Ethicality	3.91	.82	3.98	.68	.39

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

Table 10: One-way MANOVA: Opportunity Costs (OC) on Consumers' Perceptions

The results show a statistically significant effect on consumers' perceived product quality. Comparing the means, it is higher for the dupe when opportunity costs are low ( $M_{\text{lowOC}} = 3.77$  vs.  $M_{\text{highOC}} = 3.43$ ,  $F(1) = 8.60$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This means that consumers have a higher perception about the quality of the dupe, when opportunity costs are low, which also indicates a lower price difference between the dupe and the original product. There is also a statistically significant effect on consumers' perceptions about the perceived price justification. Comparing the means, it is higher for the dupe when opportunity costs are high ( $M_{\text{lowOC}} = 2.91$  vs.  $M_{\text{highOC}} = 3.83$ ,  $F(1) = 21.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Meaning that consumers are more likely to think that the price of the dupe is justified, when opportunity costs are high, implicating a higher price difference between the products. There is no significant effect on perceived brand ethicality ( $M_{\text{lowOC}} = 3.91$  vs.  $M_{\text{highOC}} = 3.98$ ,  $F(1) = .39$ ,  $p > .5$ , NS). This leads to a partial acceptance of H2b.

#### 5.4.3 The Moderating Effect of Opportunity Costs

**H3:** The impact of product similarity on purchase behaviors will be moderated by opportunity costs, such that:

**H3a:** When opportunity costs are low, product similarity has a stronger positive (vs. weaker positive) impact on purchase behaviors (purchase intention, willingness to pay) than when opportunity costs are high.

To test the last hypothesis, a MANOVA was performed on purchase intention and willingness to pay (Table 11).

	low Product Similarity		high Product Similarity		Product Similarity main effect	Opportunity Costs main effect	Product Similarity x Opportunity Costs
	low OC (n = 48)	high OC (n = 50)	low OC (n = 49)	high OC (n = 54)			
Purchase Intention A	3.06 (2.04)	2.78 (1.93)	2.98 (1.91)	2.74 (2.00)	.05	.88	.01
Purchase Intention B	2.35 (1.48)	3.68 (2.03)	2.78 (1.64)	3.72 (1.96)	.83	20.02***	.56
WTP A	479.56 (364.67)	393.62 (228.51)	505.86 (303.18)	472.76 (307.92)	1.51	1.92	.38
WTP B	312.23 (234.81)	293.06 (195.04)	410.12 (247.67)	306.33 (189.03)	3.28*	4.02*	1.90

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p \leq .1$

For a better clarification, Product A is the original Brand, Product B the dupe

Table 11: Interaction Effect: Product Similarity and Opportunity Costs

The results show no statistically significant product similarity x opportunity costs interaction effect for all tested (purchase intention A, purchase intention B, WTP A, WTP B) dependent variables (all  $F_s < 1.90$ ,  $p_s > .05$ ), thus, rejecting H3.

## 6 Conclusion

The main purpose of this dissertation was to understand the impact of product similarity between the original product and a dupe on consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions. An additional aim of the dissertation was to investigate the influence of the level of opportunity costs.

The first research question (RQ1) concerned the influence of product similarity on consumers' purchasing behaviors and perceptions. The results show an interesting and significant main effect of high rather than lower product similarity on consumers' willingness to pay. Consumers are generally willing to pay more for the original product than the dupe when product similarity is high. However, non-significant main effects of product similarity were found on purchase intention and actual choice.

The literature on counterfeiting cited the status associated with luxury products as a reason for buying counterfeits (Iyer et al., 2022). Therefore, the impact of the level of status motive was also investigated. The results changed the previous findings in that there was a significant main effect on purchase behaviors (except for the purchase intention for dupes). This means that consumers with different levels of status motive also made different judgments about their intention to purchase the original product, willingness to pay, and their actual choice.

In terms of consumers' perceptions, the results showed no significant main effect of product similarity on consumers' perceptions, more specifically on consumers' perceived quality, perceived price, and perceived brand ethicality. When the influence of status motive was examined, there were no changes in the results for perceived price and perceived brand ethicality, but there were changes for perceived quality. This suggests that consumers with a different level of status motive have different perceptions of the quality of the dupe.

The second research question (RQ2) examines the impact of opportunity costs on consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions. The results show a significant influence on the purchase intention when the opportunity costs are high. If the opportunity costs are high, which simultaneously means a high price difference between the original product and the dupe, consumers are more likely to choose the dupe. Furthermore, results show a significant main effect of opportunity costs on the willingness to pay. Consumers are willing to pay more for the original product and the dupe when opportunity costs are low. Looking at the willingness to pay for the dupe, they are willing to pay more for it, when opportunity costs are low than high. This means that consumers are more likely to purchase the dupe if opportunity costs are high but are willing to pay more for it if they are low. Yet, the results show no significant influence of opportunity costs on consumers' actual choice between product types. Regarding consumers' perceptions, there are significant influences on consumers' perceptions about the product quality and price. When opportunity costs are low, consumers have a higher perception about the product quality. In other words, if the price difference between the dupe and the original product is lower, consumers are more likely to think that the quality of the dupe is better. The results about their price perceptions show that higher opportunity costs lead to better price perceptions. Meaning that consumers are more likely to perceive the price of the dupe as justified when the price difference is high.

The analysis of the interaction effect of product similarity and opportunity cost (RQ3) did not result in a significant main effect, which means that there is no interaction effect between the two variables.

## **7 Implications**

### **7.1 Theoretical Implications**

Since, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is limited research on dupes, this work provides important theoretical implications for research and contributes to the investigation of

an important research gap. The results of research on counterfeits were taken as the basis for this dissertation and its results show that some of the research findings on counterfeits also hold for dupes.

Previous research on counterfeits found an important influence of product similarity on the purchase of counterfeits (Penz & Stöttinger, 2008; Wang et al., 2020). This result also holds for dupes, but only on the willingness to pay and not on the purchase intention and the actual choice. Since product similarity only influences consumers' willingness to pay, it could mean that other factors such as price have a stronger influence on consumers' purchase behaviors than the product similarity between the dupe and the original product. The influence of the status motive could also be confirmed in connection with dupes.

In comparison, the results of research on counterfeiting about consumers' perceptions cannot be applied to dupes. These state that product similarity has a positive influence on perceived quality, perceived price, and brand ethicality (Perez et al., 2010; Singh et al., 2012; Walsh & Mitchell, 2005), which could not be confirmed in the present study. Interestingly, the results indicate a significant effect of the status motive on the perceived product quality of dupes. They suggest that consumers with different levels of status motive have different perceptions of the quality of dupes. This differentiated view contributes to important findings in the literature and shows the importance of a differentiated view of consumer perceptions of dupes.

Previous research on counterfeits has not looked at opportunity cost, but only at price, which is the main reason for consumers to buy counterfeits (Khan et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2010). However, the present study found an influence of opportunity costs on the willingness to pay and the intention to purchase dupes. These results suggest that consumers are not only considering price, but also trade-offs. This could influence existing models and results or could be considered in new research.

Moreover, the results suggest that not only objective product features, like product similarity, but also subjective factors, like opportunity costs and status motives of consumers, contribute to consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions about dupes.

## **7.2 Managerial Implications**

The findings from the literature research and the results of the study provide information on possible managerial implications for the dupe brand.

As already described, perceived product similarity plays a major role in the consumption of counterfeits. This is why the influence of product similarity was investigated in this study. The positive influence of product similarity on the willingness to pay means that dupe brands can offer their products at a higher price if they are highly similar to the original product. In their marketing activities, they could refer to the high product similarity. They could do this, for example, by comparing their product with the original one.

Another important factor in the consumption of counterfeits is the lower price. This context was examined using opportunity costs. Consumers have a higher purchase intention for the dupe and are more likely to think that the price is justified when the opportunity costs are high. But they are in general willing to pay more for the original brand. For the dupe brand, this means that they should sell their products at a much lower price than the original product. However, the willingness to pay and quality perceptions increases with lower opportunity costs. For the dupe brand, this means that they have to find a middle ground for their pricing strategy and should observe the prices of the original product, to be able to customize their prices. In this context, the product similarity of the dupe and the original product is irrelevant.

Another aspect that has an important impact on management relates to status, which is also related to the reasons why consumers purchase counterfeits. The results support the assumption that consumers with different levels of status motive have different purchase behaviors and perceptions. Regarding managerial implications for the dupe brand, it means that they should try to understand their target group and try to tailor their marketing activities to the different target groups.

## **8 Limitations and Future Research**

Numerous limitations of the study must be considered. First to mention is the high proportion of participants from Germany. This leads to demographic biases and does not reflect the population well. Future research should ensure that it has a better distribution of participants' countries of origin. Furthermore, the study was only shared via social media, which again may have been in line with the high number of participants between the ages of 21 and 39. This should also be avoided in future research. The type of survey, an online survey, also leads to limitations. This means that the participants cannot be checked, and it is not known how conscientiously and honestly, they have answered the survey. Future research could avoid this by conducting other types of research, such as interviews or focus groups.

In this context, the social desirability bias should also be mentioned. Meaning that participants in a study adapt their answers to social expectations. This could also have influenced the results.

A further limitation of the study concerns the products presented. This could have influenced the participants' purchase behaviors and perceptions. Future research should therefore choose a different product category or, ideally, examine different products.

In addition, the direct influence of the status motive on consumers' purchase behaviors and perceptions of dupes could be investigated. Meaning how the level of status motive affects consumers' behavior and their perceptions of the dupe.

Future research could also focus on the influence of social media on the popularity of dupes and consumer behavior, as dupes are very popular on social networks. Furthermore, already researched relationships in the context of counterfeits could be interesting, to see if these results also hold for dupes. This could be, for example, the influence of dupes on the reputation of the original brand, the influence of family and friends on the purchase intention or the influence of the risk of the dupe being exposed as such. The investigation of differences between consumer behavior towards counterfeits and dupes could also be investigated in the future.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Manipulations

### Manipulation 1

**Product A**



**Rimowa Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 1,180

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

**Product B**



**SkyBound Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 500

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

### Manipulation 2

**Product A**



**Rimowa Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 1,180

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

**Product B**



**SkyBound Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 1,000

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

### Manipulation 3

**Product A**



**Rimowa Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 1,180

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

**Product B**



**SkyBound Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 500

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

### Manipulation 4

**Product A**



**Rimowa Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 1,180

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

**Product B**



**SkyBound Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 1,000

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

## Appendix 2: Main Study Survey

### Introduction Block

Welcome and thank you for participating in this survey.

This survey is part of a master thesis, and your participation is very important to its completion.

The survey takes approximately 5 minutes.

The data collected will be processed confidentially and anonymously. I therefore ask you to answer the questions as honestly as possible. There is no right or wrong answer.

If you have any questions or feedback regarding the survey, do not hesitate to contact me: s-ebreser@ucp.pt

Thank you in advance

Emily

### Block: Check for status motive

**Status Motive:** Please indicate your level of agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with the following statements about product purchases.

	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
I would buy a product just because it has status. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in new products with status. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would pay more for a product if it has status. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The status of a product is irrelevant to me. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q10:** On the next page you will see a scenario and two product descriptions. Please take enough time to review it.

**Block: Manipulation 1**

**Manipulation:** Imagine that you have decided to buy a new cabin luggage and your budget is EUR 1,200. If you stay under this budget, you just keep that money. Your research has brought you to the following two products and now you are faced with the decision to choose one of them.

**Product A**



**Rimowa Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 1,180

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

**Product B**



**SkyBound Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 500

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

**Manipulation Check:** After looking at both products, how similar do you think they are?

- 1 - Not similar at all
- 2 - Unsimilar
- 3 - Somewhat unsimilar
- 4 - Neutral
- 5 - Somewhat similar
- 6 - Similar
- 7 - Very similar

**Manipulation Check:** In your opinion, the price difference between the two products is:

- 1 - Extremely low
- 2 - Very low
- 3 - Slightly low
- 4 - Moderate

- 5 - Slightly high
- 6 - Very high
- 7 - Extremely high

**Q6:** Here is just a reminder of the products:

**Product A**



**Rimowa Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 1,180

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

**Product B**



**SkyBound Cabin Luggage**

---

EUR 500

---

- Hard shell
- 4 wheels
- PSA locks

**Price:** Please keep the products shown and their prices in mind and indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	1 – Strongly disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Somewhat disagree	4 – Neither agree nor disagree	5 – Somewhat agree	6 – Agree	7 – Strongly agree
The price for product B is too high. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The price for product B is justified. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The price difference between the two products is reasonable. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

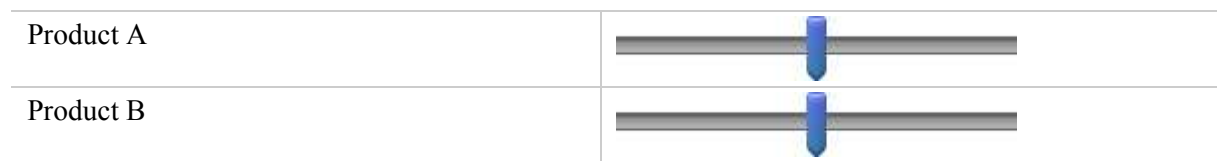
**Quality:** I think the quality of product B compared to product A will be:

- 1 - Much worse
- 2 - Moderately worse
- 3 - Slightly worse

- 4 - About the same
- 5 - Slightly better
- 6 - Moderately better
- 7 - Much better

**WTP:** What are you willing to pay for each product?

0 120 240 360 480 600 720 840 960 1080 1200



**Purchase Intention A:** How likely are you to buy product A?

- 1 - Extremely unlikely
- 2 - Moderately unlikely
- 3 - Slightly unlikely
- 4 - Neither likely nor unlikely
- 5 - Slightly likely
- 6 - Moderately likely
- 7 - Extremely likely

**Purchase Intention B:** How likely are you to buy product B?

- 1 - Extremely unlikely
- 2 - Moderately unlikely
- 3 - Slightly unlikely
- 4 - Neither likely nor unlikely
- 5 - Slightly likely
- 6 - Moderately likely

7 - Extremely likely

**Product Choice:** Which product would you buy?

Product A

Product B

**Brand ethicality:** Having product B in mind, what do you think about the following statements?

	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Somewhat disagree	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5 - Somewhat agree	6 - Agree	7 - Strongly agree
The brand respects moral laws. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand always adheres to the law. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand will make a decision only after careful consideration of the potential positive or negative consequences for all those involved. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is a good brand. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Block: Demographics**

**Q59:** Just a few more questions about yourself and you are done.

**Q2:** What gender do you identify with?

Male

Female

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

**Q3:** What is your age?

▼ Under 18 ... 60 and older

**Q4:** What is your occupation?

▼ High School Student ... Unemployed

**Q5:** What is your highest level of education?

- Less than High School
- High School graduate
- Bachelor degree
- Master degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree

**Q6:** Where do you come from?

▼ Afghanistan ... Zimbabwe

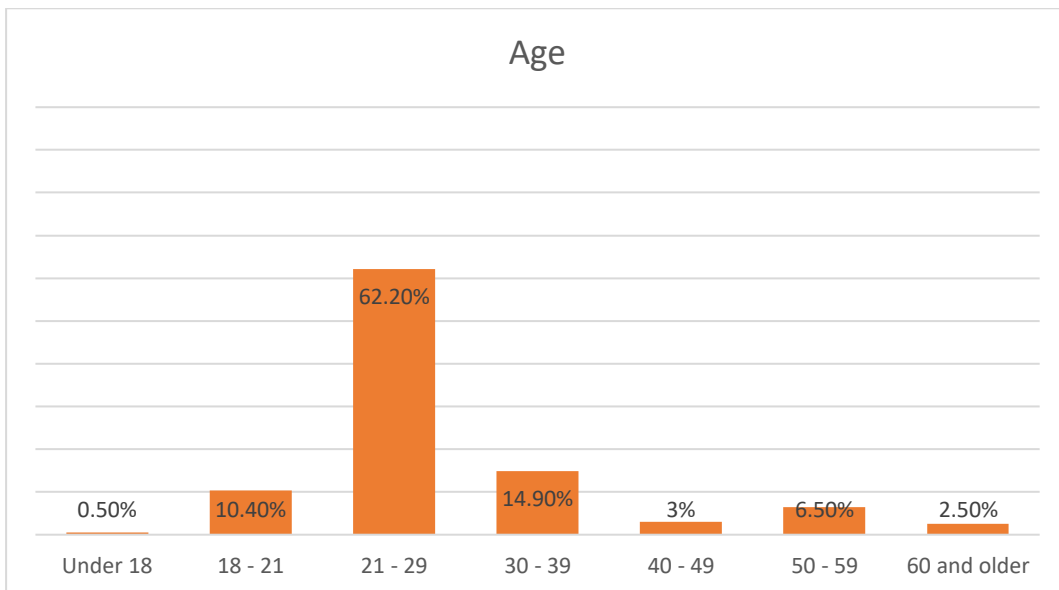
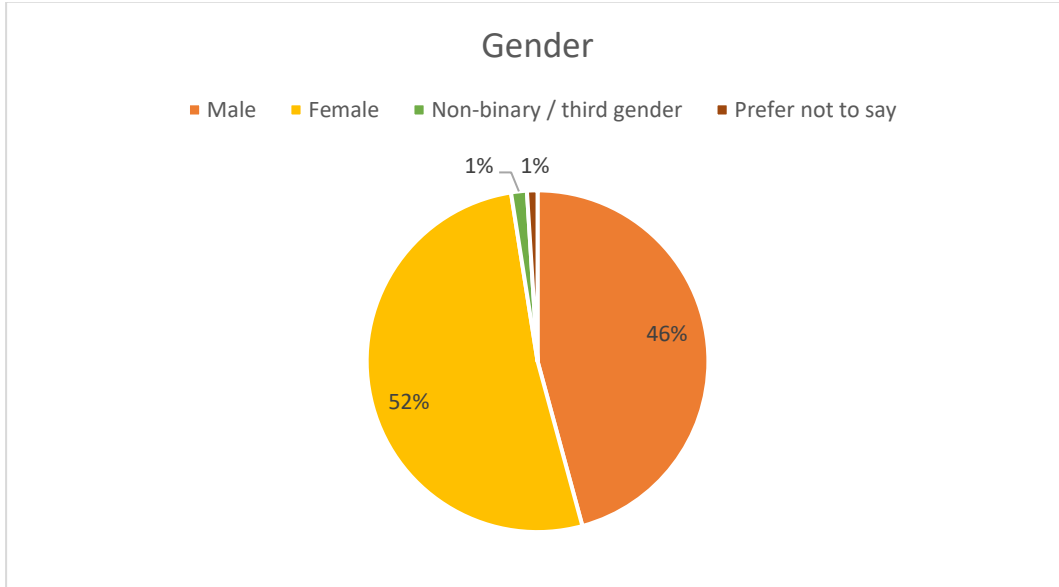
**Q7:** What is your current annual income in Euros before tax?

- Under €10,000
- €10,000 - €19,999
- €20,000 - €29,999
- €30,000 - €39,999
- €40,000 - €49,999
- €50,000 - €74,999
- €75,000 - €99,999
- €100,000 - €150,000

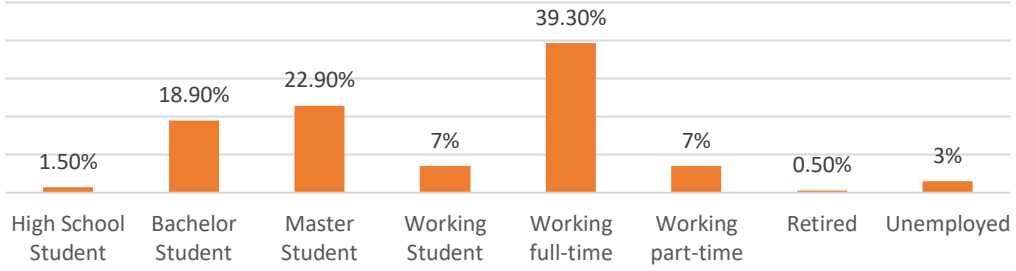
More than €150,000

Prefer not to say

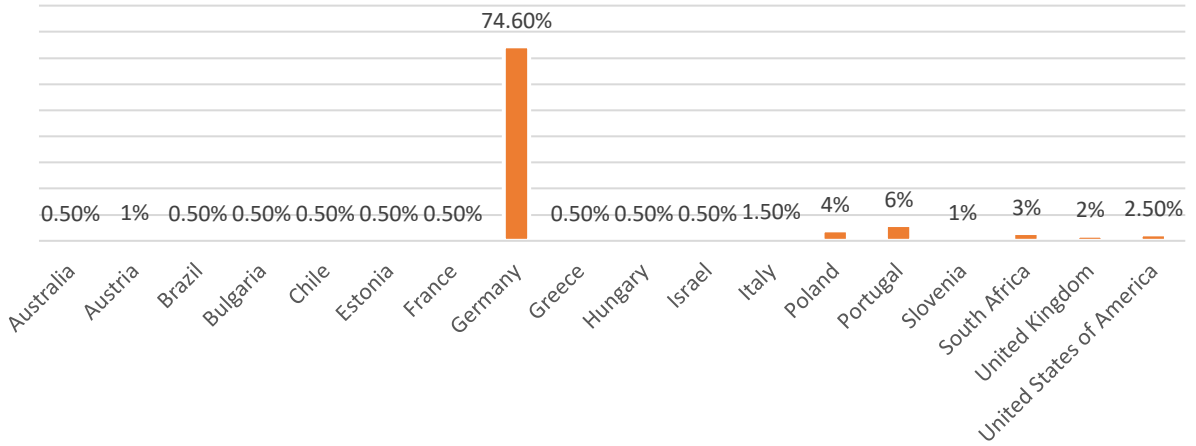
### Appendix 3: Demographic Results



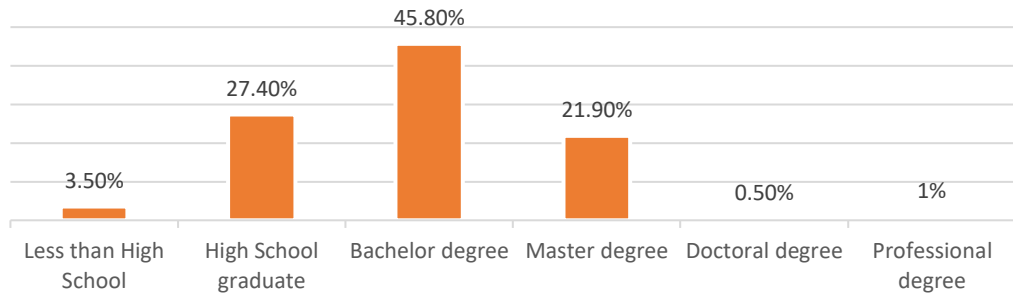
### Occupation



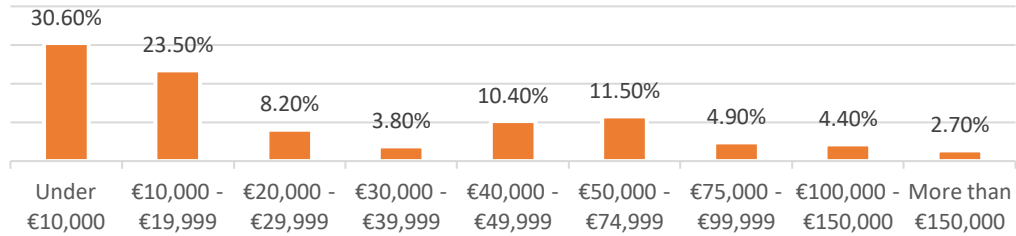
### Country of Residence



### Highest Level of Education



### Annual Income before Taxes



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