

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Self-Brand Connection and the Decision to Purchase Counterfeit and Original Luxury Brands in Tanzania

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Abstract: The research employed the method of Perceived Counterfeit Detection (PCD) to determine the significance of individuals' considerations in determining their decision to purchase original luxury brands. The study explored the relationship between self-brand connection and the purchase of counterfeit luxury brands, and also, evaluated the influence of economic benefits. The research was conducted through a survey of prospective luxury goods consumers, both original and counterfeit, in six malls located in two cities using a questionnaire. A sample of 930 participants was used, and the hypotheses were tested using a structural equation model. The findings indicate that an individual's self-concept might play a role in deciding whether to purchase an original or counterfeit luxury brand. It is noteworthy that the Perceived Counterfeit Detection completely influenced the relationship between self-brand connection and the decision to buy an original luxury brand. Furthermore, the study discovered that economic advantages intensified the inclination of consumers to buy counterfeit products in emerging economies. This contributes to the Social Identity Theory, suggesting that in scenarios heavily influenced by personal development, social pressure from one's social group might override individual moral considerations such as self-brand connection. The findings of this study hold considerable importance for managers and marketers as they enhance their comprehension of the influential role that individuals play in influencing the purchase of luxury brands. Marketing strategies need to consider the influence of family and social groups on buying choices, and advertisements should be customized accordingly.

Keywords: counterfeit luxury brand, economic benefits, perceived counterfeit detection, self-brand connection

JEL Classification: A1, A11, L6, L67



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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The study shows that consumers may be aware of brand authenticity yet still choose to buy counterfeit goods, which presents a challenge for original brand manufacturers to differentiate their luxury products through innovative design, advertising, and marketing. It also highlights the importance of improving legislation and enforcement efforts to combat counterfeiting. Effective advertising that promotes positive perceptions of the brand can help build strong brand connections and is a strategy that destination marketers can employ.



1. Introduction

The substantial expansion of luxury consumption has coincided with the widespread prevalence of counterfeit goods. Furthermore, replica luxury brands are increasingly gaining popularity in developing nations. Understanding the factors that influence buyers' willingness to purchase their preferred luxury products, whether counterfeit or authentic, could contribute to curbing the proliferation of counterfeit luxury brands. The decision to opt for counterfeits and disregard original luxury brands is linked to consumers themselves. In a study conducted by Davidson, Nepomuceno, and Laroche (2019), consumers acknowledged knowingly purchasing counterfeit luxury brands, despite recognizing its ethical implications. Additionally, consumers who are unwilling to pay the price associated with authentic luxury brands tend to gravitate toward counterfeit alternatives (Priporas, Chen, Zhao, & Tan, 2020). The current study aims to shed light on an often-overlooked segment of consumers, specifically those who exhibit strong brand connections. While numerous research investigations have focused on various aspects of consumer behavior, relatively few studies have specifically examined this distinctive subgroup. For example, Kaufmann, Petrovici, Gonçalves Filho, and Ayres (2016) found that a weak connection to a brand can reduce the behavioral intentions of purchasing counterfeit luxury brands. While the study by Chand and Fei (2021) demonstrated that consumers who are eager to build their self-concept use counterfeit luxury brands to fulfill their goal. Even though prior studies focused on different psychological reasons and attitudes toward brand purchase, and the situation cue surrounding the consumers while deciding whether to purchase original or counterfeit luxury brands was ignored (Jiang, Miao, Jalees, & Zaman, 2019; Phau & Teah, 2009). Zhang, Jin, Wang, Ma, and Yu (2019) argue that consumers may switch to purchasing counterfeit luxury goods to fulfill their social aspirations if they feel that the original luxury brand fails to meet their expectations, regardless of the specific purchasing behavior that drives their decision. Thus, consumers' behaviors are not the reasons for purchase decisions but social goals. Consumers are noticed to acquire a brand that is congruent with their ambition to become a reference group to express themselves, enhance their self-concept, and achieve self when they express their inner self and their requirements as determined by society. Findings on psychological reasons from prior studies and their influence on original or counterfeit luxury brand purchases have been ambiguous and largely inconclusive, necessitating further investigation

The paper's contribution aims to address the gap of consumers who have a strong connection to a brand while considering the influence of significant others during purchasing decisions. Specifically, the study investigates the direct impact of self-brand connections on the choice between purchasing original or counterfeit luxury brands. Self-brand connection is a noteworthy factor in this study because it reflects how much consumers integrate a brand into their self-concept. Consumers who have a strong brand connection may see themselves as unique thinkers compared to those who do not, and they may describe the brand experience in terms of the relationships they have established (Van der Westhuizen, 2018; Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015). Understanding the relationship between self-brand connections and the choice between original and counterfeit luxury brands is valuable for several reasons. First, self-brand connection serves as a determinant of consumers' perception of their own uniqueness and individuality compared to those who do not have a strong brand connection. Second, despite the recognized importance of self-brand connection, only a limited number of studies have directly examined its influence on the decision to purchase original or counterfeit luxury brands, particularly within the context of emerging economies.

Moreover, the study involved Perceived Counterfeit Detection (PCD) as the mediator in the relationship between self-brand connection and the decision to purchase original luxury brands. The present study involved perceived counterfeit detection to find out how situation cues influence an individual during the purchasing decision process. However, the aforementioned process is not enough without the application of concept or theory (Wu Gavin, 2019). Therefore, the present study included self-concept from social identity theory and reference group concept to help provide the implications. By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the study sought to provide

a more comprehensive understanding of the implications and underlying mechanisms of the relationship between self-brand connection, perceived counterfeit detection, and the decision to purchase original luxury brands. Social identity theory suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from the groups to which they belong. In the context of luxury brand consumption, individuals may associate themselves with specific brands or brand communities, thus incorporating these associations into their self-identity (Stets & Burke, 2000). This contribution was motivated by the observation that most previous literature could not consider the situation cues when examining consumer psychology in counterfeit or original luxury brand purchase decisions. Therefore, investigating the role of PCD as a mediator, the study sheds light on the cognitive process through which individuals with a strong self-brand connection make decisions regarding the authenticity of luxury brands.

Lastly, to determine whether the economic benefit would enhance, lessen, or alter the association between self-brand attachment and the purchase of counterfeit luxury brands, the study included it as a moderator. Unlike Lee, Ko, and Megehee's (2015) study, which used the economic benefit using direct relationships. By investigating the impact of economic benefit as a moderator, the study aims to provide insights into how financial considerations influence the relationship between self-brand attachment and the purchase of counterfeit luxury brands. This understanding is valuable in unraveling the complex decision-making processes and trade-offs individuals make when choosing between original and counterfeit luxury products.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Self-Brand Connection

Self-brand connection refers to the extent to which a brand is integrated into an individual's self-concept (Rhee & Johnson, 2012). Celebrities endorsing particular brands can also increase consumers' level of brand connection (Escalas, 2015). The existing literature has recognized the importance of self-brand connection and the influence of celebrity endorsements on brand connection. It has also acknowledged the significance of brands in building and reinforcing individuals' self-identity, as well as the psychological and symbolic benefits associated with brands. The literature further depicts that, some brands carry significant symbolic meanings for customers and can help in building and reinforcing their self-identity (Escalas, 2004; Lee, Ko, & Megehee, 2015). Customers may value the psychological and symbolic benefits of a brand, as it assists them in presenting themselves to others and building their self-identity (Escalas, 2004). For instance, one individual may drive a Lamborghini to fit in with their peers, while another might choose a BMW to stand out. Therefore, individuals who decide to purchase an original product with a high-quality brand that others perceive as valuable can satisfy their self-concept (Oh, 2019). Therefore, the literature suggests that individuals may choose specific brands to fit in or stand out, satisfying their self-concept. However, the research gap lies in the need for empirical studies that investigate how individuals navigate the tension between fitting in and standing out, and how this influences their brand choices and leads to purchasing an original brand.

Previous studies claimed that consumers' loyalty to brands can lead to the association of counterfeit goods (Kaufmann et al., 2016). This association may stem from a desire to align with the brand's image or values, leading individuals to unintentionally purchase counterfeit luxury brands. The study by Wu Gavin (2019) found that the self-brand connection does not end in itself, but serves as the means to personal goals. Thus, consumers can change their behavior and end up purchasing counterfeit luxury brands just to meet one of their social goals (Zhang et al., 2019). In this context, consumers may change their behavior and engage in the purchase of counterfeit luxury brands to fulfill specific social goals. These goals might include signaling a certain social status, fitting in with a particular group, or projecting a desired image to others. However, there is a need for further research that investigates the role of self-brand connection in consumers' decision-making processes and how it relates to the purchase of counterfeit luxury brands.

It has been observed that a consumer who is connected to a brand may be interested only in the appearance of the product, regardless of whether it is an original or counterfeit product, and may not necessarily use the product. Therefore, such consumers may end up purchasing counterfeit products of the same brand (Kaufmann et al., 2016). Therefore, the implication from the gathered information is that consumers' loyalty to brands, coupled with their pursuit of personal social goals, can result in a shift in behavior toward the purchase of counterfeit luxury goods.

Hypothesis 1: A consumer's self-brand connection influences positively the decision to purchase an original luxury brand.

Hypothesis 2: Self-brand connection influences positively the decision to purchase a counterfeit luxury brand.

2.2 Perceived Counterfeit Detection as a Mediator

Previous research has suggested that a strong self-brand connection can predict a decrease in the consumption of counterfeit products, as individuals are more likely to purchase original luxury brands (Cheng, White, & Chaplin, 2012). However, the current study proposes that the role of PCD (Perceived Counterfeit Deception) as a mediator should also be taken into account. Specifically, the study suggests that PCD may positively mediate the relationship between self-brand connection and the intention to purchase original luxury brands, as previous research found a negative association between PCD and the intention to purchase counterfeit products (Wu Gavin, 2019). The literature needs further investigation into the mediating role of PCD and its impact on the relationship between self-brand connection and consumers' intention to purchase original luxury brands.

The concept of PCD highlights the influence of significant others on consumers' purchasing decisions. Reference group theory suggests that people use the standards of influential individuals as a basis for self-evaluation and decision-making and that feedback from friends and family during shopping may enhance the shopping experience (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Yoshita & Rao, 2019). As a result, if a person feels a psychological connection to themselves and their reference group agrees with their views, they may derive pleasure from building their self-identity or reputation through the brands they purchase (Wenzel & Benkenstein, 2019). Consequently, consumers may opt for original luxury brands if they believe it will benefit their self-identity or reputation among their reference group. While reference group theory suggests that influential individuals and feedback from friends and family play a role in shaping consumers' self-evaluation and decision-making, the specific mechanisms and processes underlying this influence remain less explored and lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Consumers' PCD involvement mediates positively the relationship between self-brand connection and intention to purchase original luxury brands.

2.3 Economic Benefit as The Moderator

Over time, the consumption of luxury brands has evolved from being an indicator of wealth to a source of comfort and stress relief (Granot, Russell, & Brashear-Alejandro, 2013; Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2010). To construct a self-concept, it is suggested that self-brand connection to luxury brands is influenced by factors such as functional, financial, personal, and social needs (Husic & Cicic, 2009). This highlights the complexity of the relationship between individuals and luxury brands, extending beyond mere functionality or financial considerations. The amount a consumer spends on a brand depends on the environment they are in, and the extent to which their self-concept needs are met. For instance, the market for counterfeit goods is thought to be lucrative in Asia (Quoquab, Pahlevan, Mohammad, & Thurasamy, 2017).

In Asian culture, social groups carry significant weight, leading individuals to conform to the norms of influential people (Wu Meng-Shan, 2015). If expensive and flashy items or behaviors are socially acceptable within the individual's social group, then they

may feel pressured to conform and display their wealth (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Thus, the social dynamics and norms prevalent in a given environment, such as Asian culture, can significantly impact consumer behavior and spending patterns. The pressure to conform and display wealth in line with social expectations can influence consumers to opt for counterfeit goods as a means to meet their self-concept needs and fit into their social group. The financial benefits of a brand can also influence consumer decisions to purchase that brand (Friedman, 2010). Consumers' inclination to consider purchasing counterfeit products is strongly impacted by the price difference between genuine and counterfeit brands. The affordability of counterfeit luxury brands is utilized to create a social image that enhances their self-concept. After experiencing the financial advantages that come with them, consumers choose to favor counterfeit luxuries in order to present an affluent image to influential individuals

Hypothesis 4: Economic benefit involvement as a moderator influences positively the consumer connected to the brand to purchase counterfeit luxury brands.

3. Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical background, the study has developed a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that illustrates the relationship between self-brand connection and the purchase of both original and counterfeit luxury brands. Moreover, the model suggests that consumers' perceived ability to detect counterfeit products serves as a mediator between these two relationships. Furthermore, the model proposes that economic benefits play a moderating role in the relationship between self-brand connection and the purchase of counterfeit luxury brands. The study has tested the validity of this theoretical model based on the previous literature.

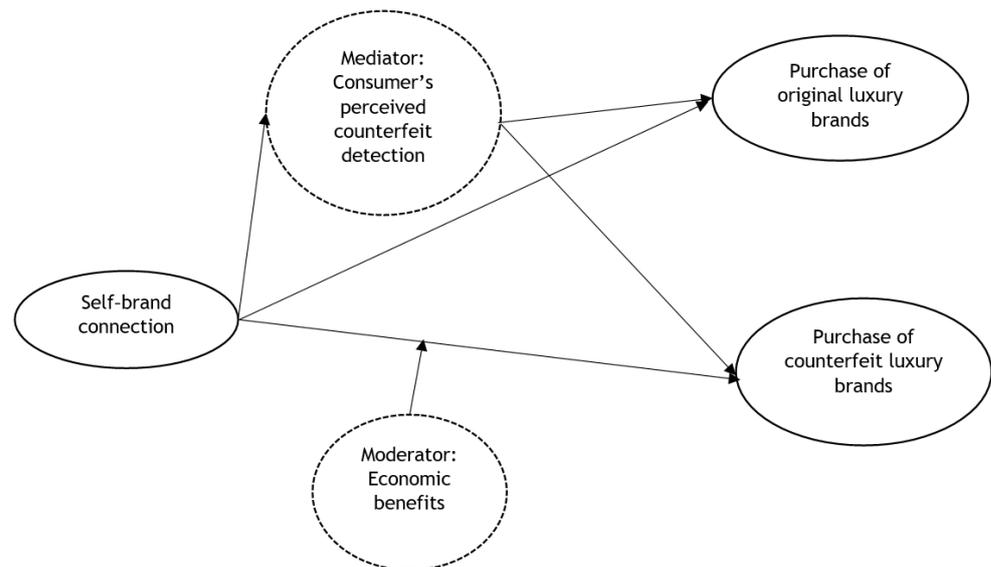


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

4. Methods

4.1 Participants

This study used a cross-sectional survey design, which is useful for investigating the quantitative description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population from a representative sample of the focal population. By definition, a research design states a type of inquiry in a research study that delivers direction and procedures for undertaking a scientific study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Pallant, 2007). The study aimed to gather data from luxury brand buyers by selecting a sample from six malls located in Dar-es-salaam and Mwanza, two cities in Tanzania for four months. For the pilot study, a total of forty questionnaires were distributed to

potential respondents in each city under investigation. Browne (1995) suggests a general guideline of having a minimum of thirty or more respondents to obtain a reliable estimation of a parameter. To facilitate the data collection process, the researchers recruited university students and provided them with training in interviewing skills.

The selected malls were recognized for their offerings of both local and international brands, and consumers entering the malls who agreed to participate were requested to make the process more accessible. To guarantee that the sample was representative, a stratified sampling plan was implemented based on the population distribution in the three malls of each city. Stratified random sampling, also known as stratification, involves the formation of strata based on the shared attributes or characteristics of the members (Sharma, 2017).

The sample size in this study was determined using the N: q rule, a widely recognized method for selecting a sample with sufficient statistical power. This rule defines 'N' as the number of cases (respondents) and 'q' as the number of parameters in the model that need to be estimated. In terms of the ratio of instances, the rule establishes the minimum required sample size (N) in relation to the number of free parameters (q) in the model (Jackson, 2003). As there were 30 parameters in the hypothesis model in this investigation that required statistical estimates, the recommended minimum sample size was 10 for the lower-dimension observations and 15 for the upper-dimension, resulting in 20 items \times 15 respondents = 300 cases. The final sample size used was 930, which met the maximum sample size as specified by this method.

4.2. Measurements

In this research, we employed well-established metrics, while also subjecting them to further reliability testing. The exogenous variable examined in this study was the self-brand connection, which refers to the degree to which consumers incorporate a brand into their self-concepts, as previously defined by Escalas and Bettman (2009). To measure the self-brand connection, we employed a set of five items that were rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). These items were adapted from Escalas and Bettman's (2003) research.

The decision to purchase counterfeit luxury brands was employed as an endogenous variable. A decision to purchase is described as a variable in consumer behavior research, representing the outcome of a consumer's intention to buy a particular product (Hoyer, MacInnis, & Pieters, 2012). The decision to purchase counterfeit luxury brands using four items was measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), adopted from Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal (1991). Similarly, the decision to purchase original luxury brands was employed as an endogenous variable, using four items measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), adopted from Yoo and Lee (2009). Perceived counterfeit detection was employed as a mediator variable.

In this study, PCD is described as an individual's perception of the probability of getting caught or being discovered by significant others for using counterfeit products (Gavin, 2019). PCD was measured using three items, each measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), as adopted by Wu Gavin (2019). Lastly, economic benefit was employed as a moderator variable. Economic benefits pertain to the gains obtained by an individual when they acquire counterfeit goods (Poddar, Foreman, Banerjee, & Ellen, 2012). The economic benefit included three items as a measurement tool adapted from Chand & Fei (2021). In addition, the study included control variables such as gender, age, and income, which were added to the path analysis to control their effects (Bian & Veloutsou, 2017; Moores & Chang, 2006; Tan, 2002). The items used are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Construct measured

Codes	Variables
Self-brand connection	
SBC1	The luxury brand reflects who I am.
SBC2	I can identify with the luxury brand.
SBC3	I feel a personal connection to the luxury brand.
SBC4	I (can) use this luxury brand to communicate who I am to other people.
SBC5	I consider this luxury brand to be “me.”
Intention to purchase original luxury brand	
DT01	The likelihood of purchasing the original brand
DT02	The probability that I would consider buying the original brand
DT03	I intend to buy the original brand
DT04	At this price shown, I would consider buying the original brand
Perceived counterfeit detection	
PCD1	Significant others around me will sense when I am wearing a counterfeit brand product from my chosen product category.
PCD2	Significant others around me will be able to recognize when I am wearing a counterfeit brand product from my chosen product category.
PCD3	Significant others around me can detect when I am wearing a counterfeit brand product from my chosen product category.
Economic benefit	
EB1	It is worth the economic investment to buy this luxury brand.
EB2	In general, I am satisfied with the price of this luxury brand.
EB3	This luxury brand is worth its high price.
Intention to purchase original luxury brand	
DTC1	I buy counterfeit products without hesitation if I have a chance to buy the counterfeits.
DTC2	I buy counterfeit products, instead of designer products, if I prefer specific brands.
DTC3	I boast about counterfeit products as if they are the genuine brand products
DTC4	I buy counterfeit products if I cannot afford to buy designer products

4.3 Analysis

To address concerns of multicollinearity, the study employed descriptive statistics on the study variables in SPSS, following the guidelines of Tabachnick and Fidell (1996). The study also checked tolerance values and variance inflation factors. The study assessed the reliability of the scales used in the research and the validity of the constructs by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Afterward, the study analyzed the data using SPSS and Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS).

To test the proposed hypotheses, our research employed the Structural Equation Model (SEM) technique with maximum likelihood estimation, as recommended by Honkanen, Verplanken, and Olsen (2006) and Honkanen et al. (2006). To confirm the mediation results, the study performed a post hoc bootstrapping analysis to evaluate the significance of the indirect paths (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The bootstrapping procedure involved creating a 95% confidence interval (percentile and bias-corrected) around the indirect effect estimates. Results with p-values less than or equal to 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

5. Findings

5.1 Respondent Characteristics

The study sample consisted of respondents with an average age range of 18 to 60 years, and diverse educational backgrounds including university graduates (40%), high school graduates (25%), junior high school graduates (20%), and those without formal education (15%). Female respondents accounted for 60% of the sample, while males accounted for 40%. The average monthly income or allowance for the respondents was between Tshs 700,000 and 4,000,000. Demographic characteristics are indicated in Table 2. To ensure the participants' familiarity with each brand, a pre-test was conducted, and only brands with an average mean score of over 9.0 out of 10.0 were chosen. The participants were shown pictures of both the original and counterfeit luxury brands (Figure 2), along with their corresponding asking prices, and were asked to complete a questionnaire to address the study's inquiry.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	558	60
Female	372	40
Education		
University graduates	372	40
High school graduates	233	25
Junior high school graduates	186	20
Others	140	15
Age		
18-25	400	43
26-35	307	33
36-45	130	14
46-55	56	6
56-60	37	4
Monthly income (in Tshs)		
700,000-1,000,000	298	32
1,000,001-2,000,000	474	51
2,000,001-3,000,000	93	10
3,000,001-4,000,000	65	7



Figure 2. Original and counterfeit Louis Vuitton purses and Rolex watches

5.2 Factor Loading and Cronbach Alpha

In the preliminary descriptive statistics test, the results showed that the bivariate correlations were below 0.50 for all variable pairs. The tolerance values ranged from 1.09 to 2.19. The validity of each measure was assessed using the Anderson and Gerbing (1988) approach.

The study assessed the reliability of the scales used in the research and the validity of the constructs by conducting confirmatory factor analysis. Our constructs are self-brand connection, Decision to purchase the original luxury brand, Decision to purchase the counterfeit luxury brand, Perceived counterfeit detection and Economic benefit. Factor Analysis (CFA) showed an acceptable model fit, with a $\chi^2 = 470.056$, $df = 237$, $RMSEA = 0.046$, $CFI = 0.967$, and $RMR = 0.035$. All factor loadings for the constructs were significant ($p = 0.001$) and high, ranging from 0.520 to 0.890 (Table 3). The reliability of the measures (Cronbach alpha) ranged from 0.690 to 0.900, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha of the constructs of the study

Construct	Factor loadings	Cronbach α
Self-brand connection		0.900
SBC1	0.520	
SBC2	0.700	
SBC3	0.800	
SBC4	0.760	
SBC5	0.870	
The decision to purchase original luxury brand		0.850
DT01	0.870	
DT02	0.850	
DT03	0.750	
DT04	0.740	
The decision to Purchase Counterfeit Luxury Brand		0.760
DTC1	0.860	
DTC2	0.890	
DTC3	0.850	
DTC4	0.820	

Construct	Factor loadings	Cronbach α
Perceived Counterfeit Detection		
PCD1	0.830	0.690
PCD2	0.790	
PCD3	0.820	
Economic benefit		
EB1	0.890	0.810
EB2	0.720	
EB3	0.770	

*Note: DTO = Decision to purchase original luxury brand, DTC = Decision to purchase counterfeit luxury brand, SBC = Self-brand connection, PCD = perceived counterfeit detection, EB = Economic benefit

5.3 Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of The Constructs of The Study

The results of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were found to be between 0.545 and 0.779, as presented in Table 4. This suggests that a latent construct accounts for more of the variance in its item measures compared to the variance it shares with other constructs (Jackson, 2003). The measurement models of the constructs were deemed reliable, with a reliability score ranging from 0.827 to 0.914. According to the standards established from the prior studies, the AVE should be greater than 0.5 and the construct reliability should be greater than 0.7. These results provide strong evidence of a fit in the measurement model and the discriminant and convergent validity of the latent construct measures, thereby allowing for confidence in proceeding with the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

Table 4. Construct reliability and validity scores and correlations among constructs

Variable	CR	AVE	DTO	DTC	SBC	PCD	EB
DTO	0.913	0.725	0.851				
DTC	0.854	0.596	0.098	0.772			
SBC	0.914	0.779	0.470	0.001	0.883		
PCD	0.892	0.734	0.232	-0.073	0.244	0.857	
EB	0.827	0.545	0.442	0.063	0.561	0.220	0.738

*Note: DTO = Decision to purchase original luxury brand, DTC = Decision to purchase counterfeit luxury brand, SBC = Self-brand connection, PCD = perceived counterfeit detection, EB = Economic benefit

5.4 Results of Consumer's Self-Brand Connection on Decision to Purchase

After verifying the validity of the measurement model, the causal relationships among the variables were established based on the proposed paths, and the structural model was tested using the entire sample of participants. The model fit was satisfactory, and as predicted, it confirmed the significant and positive correlation between self-brand connection and the decision to purchase original luxury brands ($\beta = 0.52$, $p = 0.000$) and between self-brand connection and the decision to purchase counterfeit luxury brands ($\beta = 0.37$, $p = 0.000$). Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were confirmed. The visual presentation of the results is shown in Figure 3 below. The summary of the structural equation model confirmed hypotheses 1 and 2.

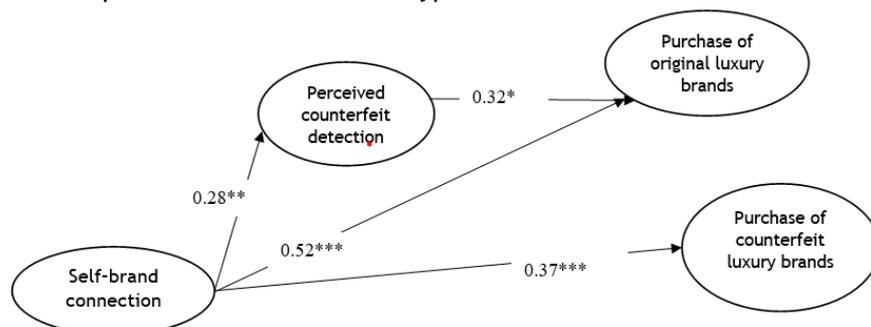


Figure 3. Summary of structural equation model results

5.5 Results of Perceived Counterfeit Detection as a Mediator

As the basic condition for mediation occurs, Joseph, William, Barry, and Rolph (2009) recommend that, firstly, the predictor variable should be significantly related to the mediator variable, and the mediator variable should be significantly related to the outcome variable. In our case, self-brand connection is significantly related to PCD ($\beta = 0.28, p = 0.001$) and PCD is significantly related to willingness to purchase the original brand ($\beta = 0.32, p = 0.01$). Secondly, after the significant direct effect between exogenous and endogenous variables, the link between the predictor and the outcome variable should be weakened or changed to insignificant by the addition of the mediating variable in the model. Thus, two models are compared in the test of whether PCD has a mediating effect (Table 5): one in which the path from PCD is constrained to zero (without the mediator) (Model 1) and one in which all paths among variables are allowed to vary (Model 2).

Variations in the structural coefficients between the two models are checked to verify whether the mediation effect of PCD is significant. Therefore, there was a significant impact between self-brand connection and the decision to pay for the original luxury brand when PCD is constrained to zero ($\beta = 0.52, p = 0.000$) in Model 1. Moreover, a significant impact was found between self-brand connection and the decision to pay for counterfeit luxury brands ($\beta = 0.37, p = 0.000$) in Model 1. In Model 2, which frees the path from the mediator (PCD) to the outcome variable, the entire amount of variance of SBC explains the decision to buy original brands and is explained through PCD ($\beta = 0.40, p = 0.10$); thus, full mediation. However, the 2,000 times of bootstrapping provide the significant p-value that provided that conclusion. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was confirmed.

Table 5. Results on perceived counterfeit detection as a mediator

	Model 1		Model 2	
SBC-DTO	0.52	***	0.40	Full mediation
SBC-DTC	0.37	***		
Fit statistics				
χ^2	468.001		470.056	
p	0.000		0.000	
df	220		237	
RMR	0.030		0.035	
CFI	0.988		0.967	
RMSEA	0.045		0.046	

*Note: ** $p \leq 0.05$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

5.6 Results of Economic Benefit as a Moderator

This study explored the impact of self-brand connections on consumers' choices to buy counterfeit luxury brands and whether economic advantage serves as a moderator. The results revealed a robust and positive relationship between self-brand connection and the decision to purchase counterfeit luxury brands ($0.46, p = 0.001$). The effect of self-brand connection on the decision to buy counterfeit luxury goods was notably strengthened by the presence of economic benefits, increasing from 0.367 to 0.460. These findings suggest that consumers are more likely to purchase counterfeit luxury brands when they receive greater economic advantages and confirmed hypothesis 4. The moderation results are presented in Figure 4.

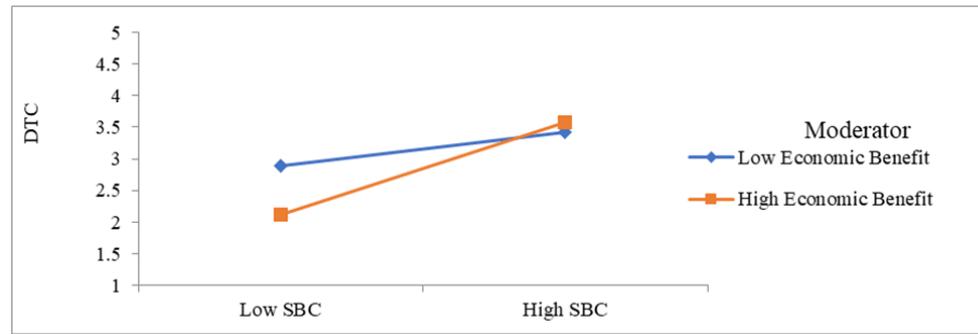


Figure 4. Moderation results of the study

6. Discussion

The study utilized a structural equation model and found a significant and positive relationship between self-brand connection and the purchase of both counterfeit and original luxury brands. This indicates that consumers are likely to purchase a brand that aligns with their desire to be part of a reference group, express their individuality, enhance their self-concept, and attain a sense of self through showcasing their inner selves (Park, Macinnis, Priester, & Eisingerich, 2010). Consistent with previous research showing that which suggests that consumers who seek to enhance their self-concept are more likely to purchase counterfeit luxury brands, but differ in terms of the unique background and characteristics of the participants (Chand & Fei, 2021).

The study found that the relationship between self-brand connection and the decision to buy original luxury brands was stronger compared to the decision to purchase counterfeit luxury brands. This result differs from the findings of Zhang et al. (2019), who did not consider consumer behavior in their study. Zhang et al.'s results suggested that customers may switch between counterfeit and original luxury brands depending on whether their social goals are met. As Thompson and Haytko (1997) suggested, consumers are driven by the nature of self and society. The stronger relationship between self-brand connection and the decision to purchase original luxury brands encourages producers of original luxury brands.

Moreover, the study shows that consumers may be aware of brand authenticity yet still choose to buy counterfeit goods, which presents an opportunity for original brand manufacturers to differentiate their luxury products through innovative design, advertising, and marketing. It also highlights the importance of improving legislation and enforcement efforts to combat counterfeiting. Effective advertising that promotes positive perceptions of the brand can help build strong brand connections and is a strategy that destination marketers can employ as also highlighted by Lee and Hsieh (2022).

Additionally, the study builds upon the idea that consumers' opinions of original brands may be influenced by seeing them being used by influential individuals (Amaral & Loken, 2016). It uses Perceived Counterfeit Detection (PCD) as a mediator between self-brand connection and the decision to purchase authentic luxury brands, which is a unique approach compared to the study by Wu Gavin (2019). The results of the study suggest that consumers with a self-brand connection are more likely to choose original luxury brands if they believe that influential people will know about their choice. Building on the idea that consumers tend to rely on reference groups when forming associations with brands, Escalas and Bettman (2003) suggested that such associations can play a crucial role in shaping one's self-concept, as individuals seek to either verify or enhance their sense of identity. The relationship between self-brand connection and the decision to purchase original luxury brands is fully explained through PCD.

The study also shows that a consumer's self-concept may differ based on their context, which contributes to social identity theory (Hanspal & Devasagayam, 2017). The influence of a consumer's social group may be stronger than their personal beliefs (such as self-brand connection) when it comes to enhancing their ego or self-image. According to a study by Salimi and Khanlari (2018), companies have been successful in enhancing consumers' self-image by creating brand attachments with them. Additionally, economic factors can play a role in a consumer's decision to buy a luxury brand (Sharma & Sonwalkar, 2013). The presence of economic benefits strengthened the relationship between self-brand connection and the choice to purchase a counterfeit luxury brand. The results of this study have significant implications for managers and marketers in their understanding of the role that influential people play in shaping luxury brand purchases. Marketing strategies should take into account the impact of family and social groups on purchasing decisions, and advertisements should be tailored accordingly. Different regions may require different marketing approaches to curb the appeal of counterfeit luxury brands and promote the use of original luxury.

This paper has several limitations that await further investigation. One limitation is that the current study was conducted with Tanzanian individuals, which raises concerns of cultural differences. To provide intriguing results, future research should include diverse cultures using the same relationship as a comparison study. The current study looked at the direct effect of self-brand connection on the decision to buy original or counterfeit luxury brands. The study considered a situation cue in which customers were made aware of whether the brand was original or counterfeit during the brand selection process, an act that may have influenced consumers to select original rather than counterfeit brands. For more credible responses from customers, future studies should not divulge such information. Future studies could vary the two types of self-brand connections using our model to see whether there are any differences.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature on self-brand connection and luxury brand purchases. Previous research has shown that consumers with strong self-brand connection are more likely to purchase luxury brands as a means of expressing their individuality and enhancing their self-concept. The self-concept has been discussed in the social identity theory suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from the groups to which they belong. This implies that the consumer's sense of self is influenced by the social groups we identify with, such as family, friends, organizations, or communities. The beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors associated with these groups become integrated into our self-concept. Consumers derive a sense of identity and belonging from their affiliations with these groups, and they contribute to how they perceive and define themselves. Thus, our self-concept is shaped by the groups we belong to, indicating the importance of social identity in understanding how individuals perceive and define themselves.

Similarly, the study found that consumers with a self-brand connection may remain loyal to original brands, even in the presence of counterfeit luxury brands. This highlights the importance of building strong brand connections and promoting positive perceptions of the brand through effective advertising and marketing. The study's emphasis on the importance of legislation and enforcement efforts to combat counterfeiting aligns with previous literature on the negative impact of counterfeit goods on the luxury brand market. Moreover, the study's findings on the role of influential people in shaping luxury brand purchases also align with previous research on the impact of social groups and reference groups on consumer behavior. Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing further evidence of the relationship between self-brand connections and luxury brand purchases.

Practically, the study highlights the significance of self-brand connections in influencing consumer behavior. Marketers can leverage this insight by focusing on building strong brand connections through innovative design, advertising, and marketing strategies for original luxury brands. Emphasizing the unique features and

qualities of authentic luxury products can help differentiate them from counterfeit goods and attract consumers who value self-expression and enhance their self-concept.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between self-brand connection and consumer behavior. It confirms that consumers with a strong self-brand connection are more likely to purchase both counterfeit and original luxury brands. This finding supports the idea that consumers seek to express their individuality, enhance their self-concept, and fulfil their self-presentation needs through the brands they choose. The study introduces perceived counterfeit detection as a mediator between self-brand connection and the decision to purchase authentic luxury brands. This suggests that consumers with a strong self-brand connection are more likely to choose original luxury brands if they believe that influential people will be able to detect the authenticity of their purchases. This finding contributes to understanding the cognitive processes and mechanisms underlying the relationship between self-brand connection and brand choices.

Lastly, the methodological implications of the study include the use of structural equation modeling, comparative analysis of previous research, consideration of mediating variables, acknowledgment of contextual factors, and practical implications for marketing strategies. These implications provide guidance for future researchers and marketers in conducting similar studies and developing effective strategies in the luxury brand industry.

8. Recommendation

The original luxury brand manufacturers should focus on building strong brand connections with consumers. This can be achieved through innovative design, advertising, and marketing that promotes positive perceptions of the brand. Efforts to combat counterfeiting should be intensified through improved legislation and enforcement. This is particularly important as counterfeit luxury brands can have a negative impact on the market. Marketers should take into account the impact of family and social groups on purchasing decisions, and advertisements should be tailored accordingly. The influence of influential people on luxury brand purchases should be considered in marketing strategies. For example, highlighting the use of the brand by influential individuals can enhance the appeal of original luxury brands. Future research should address the limitations of the current study, including cultural differences and the impact of situation cues on customers' responses. Managers and marketers should remain vigilant and up-to-date with the changing consumer preferences and behaviors in the luxury brand market to make necessary adjustments to their marketing strategies.

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