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## A STUDY ON CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COUNTERFEIT PRODUCTS AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES



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### ABSTRACT

The reason for this study is to develop a model and test this model also is about the extraction of major experiences of the consumers which they got from intentional arrogance and readiness to purchase of the substitutes of the luxury fashion products. Substitutes have created serious challenges for all countries of the globe. The problem has been experienced by the original brand's authentic products manufacturing companies. The intake of the substitutes is studied in this research. To fill the gap in the literature for the readiness to buy substitutes of the luxury fashion products in Pakistan, for extracting determining factors study is done. Found south of East Asia as hub for trading and consuming the substitutes. The study was done with 257 samples from three big markets (Katchery Bazar, Satyana Road, and D-Ground) of Faisalabad during 2019. Questionnaires are used for data collection in all days (weekends and weekdays) from people come with intention to buy substitutes. To check the relation between variables and testation of the hypothesis SEM (structural equation modeling) technique was used. The study closed with these results; Tendency to avoid risk was negative but trivial, peer effect, previous outing, arrogance and monetary arrogance towards substitutes were found significant and positive, Tendency to avoid risk insignificant and negative, appealing characteristics of purchase of substitutes and readiness to buy resulted positive and insignificant. This study found after studying previous researches and theories available in the field of marketing and consumer behavior successive to explore the major determining factors after testing a wide range model. These major determining factors are arrogance towards substitutes and user readiness to purchase the substitutes of luxury fashion products.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Product counterfeiting is now a common practice around the globe but most critically in

developing countries. Because people don't take their use of counterfeits as harmful or illegal. Most of these citizens are commonly follow rules and abide by the law in all other acts and social behavior but in case of counterfeit products, they don't even bother that it is an act like theft of intellectual property and it hurt the creativity.

The production and consumption of counterfeits are creating serious economic problems. Counterfeiters sell their products through irregular ways and mostly unaccountable. They avoid taxes and manipulate the facts about their production and quality of products. They produce low quality but the packing and other elements are being made so wisely that someone hardly differentiates the counterfeit and authentic brands. This practice is most common in counterfeit fashion and apparel products because every young and middle age person today wants to wear something important.

The concept of counterfeiting came to know more than 40 years back (Bian & Veloutsou, 2007). When very first time Levi's came to know that the massive production of its products is carried on in South East Asia that is unauthorized (Walker, 1981). Initially, it was an insignificant phenomenon and a few producers of status products were affected. Since then production and use of counterfeit products increased drastically. Especially fashion products like clothes, shoes, watches, ladies' bags, cap, sun shades, sports outfit and gents purse are available in every market of the world. Now it becomes a serious global economic problem.

Southeast Asia is producing most of the counterfeit luxury fashion products. The sale of counterfeit products has increased from \$5.5 billion in 1982 to \$500 billion in 2009. Pakistan is also a big market for counterfeits like India and China. The purpose of the study is to probe the determinants and factors that really drive consumers to use counterfeit products knowingly. The demand side of counterfeit products requires equal attention as the success story of counterfeit products may be associated with demand for counterfeits and personality traits of the users.

Counterfeiting defined as the process of production and sale of fake and low-quality products that look similar to the original ones whose copyrights and patents are protected. A famous definition is "any unauthorized manufacturing of goods whose special characteristics are protected as intellectual property rights (trademarks, patents, and copyrights) constitutes product counterfeiting." (Cordell, Wongtada, & Kieschnick, 1996).

Making and trading of replicated goods have been a serious threat to the authentic and genuine products carrying significant brand values in the market. The manufacturers of authentic products know these counterfeit products in the market and trying to save their historical image, brand names, revenues, and popularity (Green & Smith, 2002; Nash, 1989).

A recent study by Hofman and Keates (2013) suggests that Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Gucci, Chanel, Cartier, and Rolex are the brands that rule the horizon of fashion and style. They bring prestige to their users and also convey a message of the elite. But their prices are very high and a very selective class can purchase them. People who want to wear designer outfits but not ready yet to jump into designer prices resort to counterfeit products. Even the green products (Salimi, 2019) may be of no concern.

They purchase and use products that are the exact replica of these brands and can't be differentiated by the naked eye. This study will reveal the traits which encourage customers to buy

counterfeit goods. Obviously, one big factor is the price difference but during this study, the researcher will evaluate all the soft aspects prevailing in society to purchase these goods. This study will help marketers to understand the consumer pattern in purchase of different goods.

Display of status is related to the display of luxury and such wasteful seemingly display is obvious in human behavior (BliegeBird et al., 2005). To illustrate this if we remember that a few years ago the media mogul Ted Turner pledged millions of dollars for the welfare of the general public. American authority on philanthropy declared that on Valentine's Day in 2003 real estate big gun Donald Trump spends around one million in charity. Such examples are much common in whole world. The reason is very simple that such people want to be status symbols and improve their social position further. Such status symbol motives lead people to spend heavy amounts on general public. Otherwise- Both of them already have a luxury life as they have their personal ships, jets and luxury cars.

## 2. THE STUDY HYPOTHESES

There is a total of nine hypotheses used in this study.

**Hypothesis 1:** Consumers who are inclined to spend a prestigious lifestyle have a positive attitude towards genuine brands.

Risk-taking tendencies vary from person to person, depending on the product category this differentiate the non-buyers from buyers especially when the purchase decision and the product are riskier to buy. For instance, at this personality trait internet buyers are quite different from non-buyers (Donthu & Garcia, 1999). A negative relationship was found between the tendency to avoid risk and behavior in previous researches regarding counterfeit purchases. The tendency in an individual's behavior to avoid taking risks is known as Risk Aversion and is usually regarded as important elements of an individual's personality (Bonoma & Johnston, 1979; Zinkhan & Karande, 1991).

**Hypothesis 2:** Tendency to avoid risk compels the consumer to purchase genuine brands only.

Buying decision regarding counterfeits is always got a stimulus from social circle of an individual includes friends, colleagues, and relatives. Because they believe that their shopping experience with friends and peers could be an enjoyable thing. Peer effects are important in social factors that cause individuals to behave certainly (Ajzen, 1991). Consumers decide to buy such counterfeit brands normally to leave nice impressions on others (Bearden et al., 1989).

**Hypothesis 3:** Peer effect leaves a positive impact on consumers to buy counterfeits.

Previous practices have been found one of the major forecasters of later behavior than any other factor of perception and intents to control behavior (Bagozzi, 1981; Ouellette & Wood, 1998). A certain behavior becomes a habit if practiced repeatedly, after that we start relying more on our previous experience of some certain behavior than current judgments (Bamberg et al., 2003).

Therefore, the previous buying experience of counterfeit brands always guides the consumer's

intention to purchase such products again. Consumers that purchase counterfeit products don't view this unethical act as they are different than non-buyers (Hoon et al., 2001).

**Hypothesis 4:** Consumer's previous outings with the counterfeit leave a sounding effect to repurchase.

The reason behind all this restriction is simply to make some class feel superior and dominant in society. The sumptuous Wardrobe of Elizabeth I (1533-1603) is clear evidence of her dominant position in society (MacKendrick et al., 1982). Now with the development of industry and improved senses of society, every person can own jewelry, clothing, handbags, cars, cellular phones, and watches. Status-conscious people use special brands like Rolex, Apple, Gucci, and Bottega Veneta.

**Hypothesis 5:** Extravagant spending on actual products creates a higher pull for counterfeit.

It has been found in research that consumers buy counterfeits not only for monetary benefits, but they also take benefits from other characteristics like the brand's name, reputation, logo, prominence, and popularity, furthermore they tend to be associated with these brands. Such characteristics are also known as appealing characteristics (Babin et al., 1994).

**Hypothesis 6:** Appealing characteristics of a brand create a bigger demand for its counterfeits.

Previous studies have shown that the direct financial consequences, such as paying a lower price, affect the tolerance of suspicious behavior of consumers (Dodge et al., 1996). A study of (Bloch et al., 1993) found that the consumer to choose a fake item on a real product if there is a price advantage. Rationally Consumers are more interested in the quality life of the product; they consider reliability and durability more than other characteristics especially when the product is functional type (Greenberg et al., 1983). There is huge difference between quality and price of counterfeits and original ones, choice is always of consumers (Gentry et al., 2006; Prendergast et al., 2002).

Consumers if they don't have any financial restrictions they are willing definitely to pay for original ones. Because they think such products can promote their social status and for that counterfeits are available to be purchased and sold (Hoon et al., 2001; Van Kempen, 2003).

**Hypothesis 7:** Financial benefits of counterfeits increase its likelihood.

The theory of reasoned actions (Bian & Veloutsou, 2007) was not rich enough to explain the links between attitude and behavior. The theory of Planned Behavior (TBM) is relatively more beneficial than the Theory of reasoned actions (Notani, 1998). PBC - Perceived Behavioral Control explained by Ajzen (1991) as the performance of behavior (good or bad) depends completely on beliefs. The intention to buy counterfeits can better be predicted by PBC explaining the fact that these purchases are backed by convenience and trouble that can be forecasted. That's why an individual can enjoy more control over the attitude to perform specific behavior (Armitage & Christian, 2003; Armitage & Conner, 2001; Notani, 1998; Ravis & Sheeran, 2003).

**Hypothesis 8:** Consumer behavior towards counterfeits pushes customers to purchase counterfeit goods.

Swaggerers are having a low-income level but high in need of standing. These are the right substitute of the luxury products users having very strong arrogance towards those needs which are unsatisfied for wealth and social standing. They are always concerned about their internal deficiencies. And want them to be submissive as soon as possible. Drive theory of the inspiration seems working here right way because it provides the base for the hypothesis relating to the arrogance towards the substitutes of the fashion luxury products, social standing signaling, extravagant spending and tendency to avoid risk. Furthermore, Ajzen (1991) debated that the purchase of substitute products is being that type of action, which is influenced by the nature of the environment and situations. As long as the intention to buy the substitutes of luxury fashion products is taken into consideration. It is according to the shape of the situations and environments which is good for them. These may be same as these substitutes are available easily in many markets of the country as they are supplied on large scale because of their economy in price and usage by the people. These substitute products available easily as compared to the original ones. This ease of availability of the substitutes moreover clearly defines the relationship between thought about doing anything and actual actions. All this shows that the readiness to purchase a substitute for the luxury fashion good is going to be settled as the actual buying behaviors indicator which is based on the build concepts for the research study.

**Hypothesis 9:** Consumer willingness to buy counterfeit depends upon its behavior towards counterfeit products.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The hidden precedents of intentions for buying counterfeit luxury fashion goods were tried to be disclosed as the purpose of this study. It was getting more exploratory study as factors were not well defined and measured. Not enough research work has been done on factors of consumer willingness to buy counterfeit luxury fashion products in consumer markets of Pakistan. In the case of an exploratory study, not enough information is known and readily available (Blumberg, Cooper, & Schindler, 2008).

When data is collected in numeric format quantitative technique of research was selected and different mathematical and statistical tools are implemented to analyze the data.

A well-built questionnaire consists of different closed-ended questions was used as the research instrument. These questions are designed to measure ultimate dependent factors like; consumer behavior towards counterfeits and subsequently consumer willingness to buy counterfeits. The questionnaire is a major instrument for research that is used by the researchers most of the time as the questionnaire is a pre-developed set of written options that respondents have to choose from against each question asked in questionnaire. It is more helpful when researcher's mind is clear about factors to be measured (Sekaran, 2003).

#### 3.2 DATA SOURCES

The data was collected from primary resources as this study based on primary research. The information taken first-hand by the researcher on interested constructs refers to Primary Data

(Sekaran, 2003). Three research assistants collected data from respondents. These research assistants from three big markets of Faisalabad; Katchery bazar, Satyana Road, and D-Ground considered to be big markets of Faisalabad, are the MBA students studying in one of the largest Public Sector Universities of Punjab, Pakistan.

They were trained enough to collect data from their respected markets. The data was collected from consumers who were available physically to shop in markets. Respondents were asked first, whether they are using counterfeits are not, if yes, then were given a questionnaire after a very short introduction about the study.

### 3.3 POPULATION AND UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Faisalabad is the big city of Punjab province and a big fashion market known as the city of textiles. Individual customers having a purchase intention for counterfeit luxury fashion products are the unit of analysis for this study.

To know the reasons and ways that people use to purchase and use counterfeit luxury fashion products consumers of age 20 to 40 years from 03 big markets (Katchery bazar, Satyana Road, and D-Ground) were included in the population. D-Ground is a big market of Faisalabad and known for status, culture and fashion standards.

The sample size of this study was 300 respondents, around 100 from each market. Three hundred questionnaires were arranged to fulfill by consumers of counterfeited products. Except for a few respondents that were initially reported missing values, 257 responses were found useful.

### 3.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 exhibits the relationship between all studied variables. There are seven variables linking to customer behaviors towards buying counterfeit products.

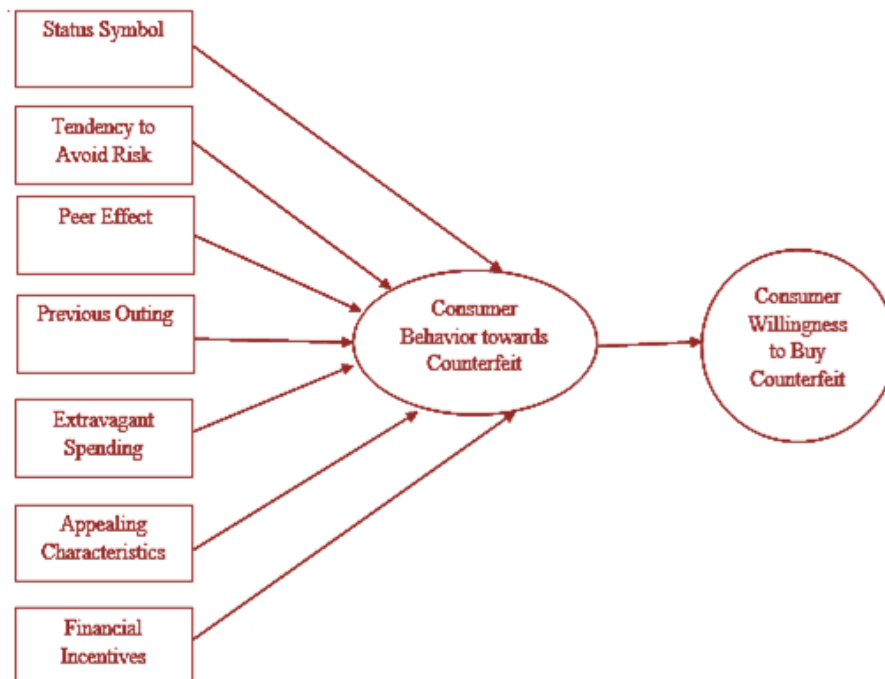


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## 4. RESULT AND FINDING

In the structural equation model, the structural relationship was added on three different levels.

The first level had the seven variables that compel a customer to use counterfeit which includes the status symbol, tendency to avoid risk, peer effect, previous outing, extravagant spending, appealing characteristics, and financial incentives. All these were, in combine, were the effecting the second phase which had only one variable, consumer behavior towards counterfeit. This variable can also be called a mediating variable. The same variable, which then, affecting the third and final phase of the path, consumer willingness to buy counterfeit. In short, each variable affected consumer behavior towards counterfeit and then consumers willing to buy counterfeit. When the structural equation model was run on LISREL, it showed model as good fit. The resulting figures include; Chi-square  $X^2 = 59.289$  ( $P < 0.001$ ), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)=0.568, Degree of Freedom DF=25; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.0559; Goodness of Fit (GFI) = 0.963; Normal Fit Index (NFI) =0.940; Confirmatory Fit Index (CFI) = 0.968. In order to remove the non-significant paths, the modification in the model was made and the base used for this purpose was modification indices. After the modification, the resultant model was rather fit than the previous one. The data reveals these values;  $X^2 = 50.835$  ( $P < 0.001$ ), SRMR=0.0547 DF=25; RMSEA = 0.064; GFI = 0.971; NFI = 0.959; CFI = 0.978. The model was modified with greater care and it was taken care that any modification made must have theoretical support. In actual model, no variable of counterfeit was directly having an impact on consumer willingness to buy counterfeit but in the modified model, there were couple of variables that had a direct relationship with consumer willingness to buy counterfeit, in addition to their relationship with consumer attitude towards counterfeit. The new model, called modified conceptual framework, is provided in the diagram. The parameters estimates are grafted from standardized solution are provided. It also includes t-values and standard errors.

#### 4.1 MODIFIED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

After the study, the modified conceptual framework is proposed to better suit this study, as shown in Figure 2.

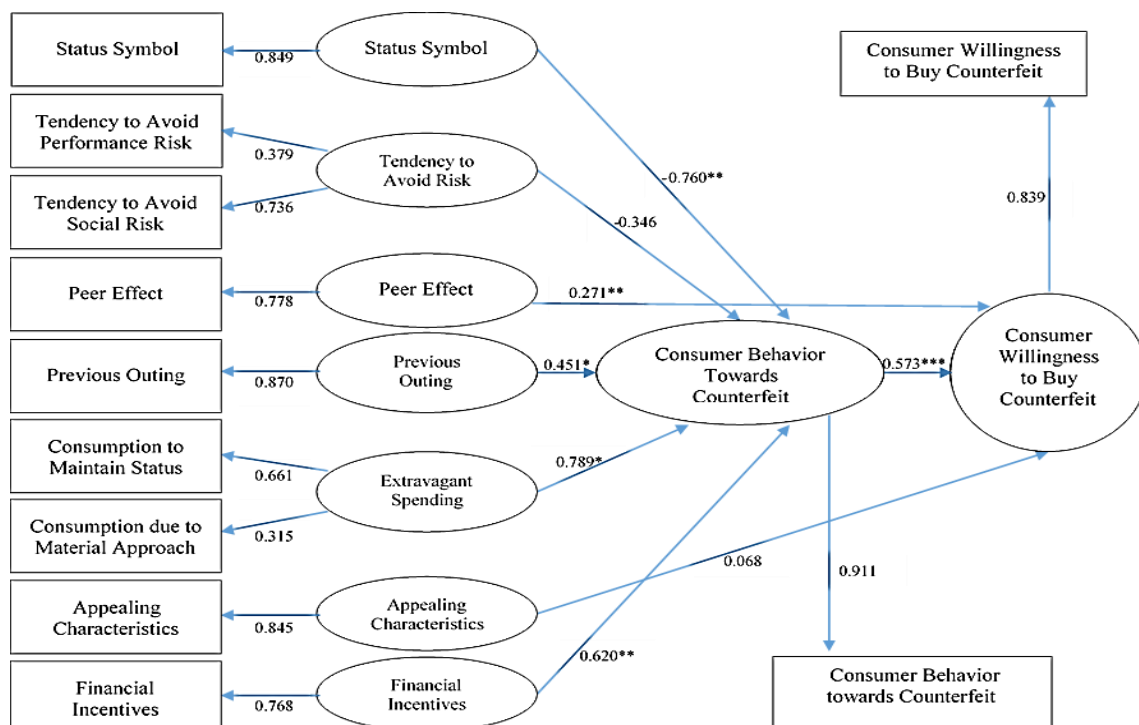


Figure 2: Modified Conceptual Framework.

**Table 1: Parameter Estimates.**

Path from	To	Mean	SD	t-value
Status Symbol →	Consumer behavior towards counterfeit	0.760**	0.348	-2.214
A tendency to avoid the risk →	Consumer behavior towards counterfeit	-0.346	0.816	-1.187
Financial incentives →	Consumer behavior towards counterfeit	0.620**	0.294	2.203
Previous outing →	Consumer behavior towards counterfeit	0.451*	0.31	1.791
Extravagant spending →	Consumer behavior towards counterfeit	0.789*	1.468	1.819
Appealing characteristics →	Consumer willingness to buy counterfeit	0.068	0.132	0.758
Peer effect →	Consumer willingness to buy counterfeit	0.271**	0.164	2.258
Consumer behavior towards counterfeit →	Consumer willingness to buy counterfeit	0.573***	0.23	5.4

\*\*\*p<0.01      \*\*p<0.05      \*p<0.10

All the constructs employed in this paper had single indicators but the two of them had more than one indicators. These constructs include extravagant spending and a tendency to avoid risk. Extravagant spending had two indicators and these indicators include consumption to maintain status and consumption due to materialistic approach. On the other hand, tendency to avoid risk also has two indicators. These indicators include the tendency to avoid social risk and the tendency to avoid performance risk. The table given above shows the path of indicators and also shows signs of good fit and very well significance between the measures and constructs.

Among the paths, one path which is derived from financial incentive and ends up at consumer behavior towards counterfeit shows positive values and it is also recorded as being significant. The value is read as “0.620,  $p < .05$ ”. This proves it as a very vital relationship of counterfeit when it comes to the purchase or demand of these kinds of products as it tends to influence consumer behavior towards counterfeit at a big time. Another path that is derived from the tendency to avoid risk ends up at consumer behavior towards counterfeit products shows negative value and it is also not significant. The value is read as “-0.349”. It must be noted that this variable, tendency to avoid risk had two constructs; tendency to avoid social risk and tendency to avoid performance risk. Among several, a path that is derived from previous outing towards consumer behavior towards counterfeit shows positive value. It is also rated as significant. The values can be read as “0.451,  $p < 0.10$ ”. Last but not least, a very dominating variable, status symbol, finds its path towards consumer behavior towards counterfeit. Its value was negative but the good thing is, it was recorded as being significant. Statistical results show the value as “-0.760,  $p < 0.05$ ”.

A path which is derived from appealing characteristics and it is ended up at consumer willingness to buy counterfeit is recorded as positive. It is also resulted as insignificant and the value reads at 0.071. It can be extracted from the result that one of our hypotheses, appealing characteristics, is not doing any good here. Another path that is derived from one of the constructs, peer effect, and ended up at consumer willingness to buy counterfeit is observed to be positive. It is also recorded as significant. The values are read as “0.264,  $p < 0.05$ ”. Moving further, the result can be extracted, one



of the hypotheses, peer effect, is giving some shoulder to the theory. Our mediating variable which was the link between constructs of counterfeit and consumer willing to buy counterfeit, consumer behavior towards counterfeit, is displaying a positive path. It is also recorded as a significant path estimate that leads to consumer willingness to buy counterfeit. The values are read as “0.565,  $p < 0.01$ ”. It can be extracted from the result that the hypothesis of consumer behavior is getting some shoulder here.

After the entire study and result extracted through statistical analysis, it can be declared that the structural model displays that all the variables that propel users to buy counterfeit products leave effect on consumer attitude towards counterfeit. It then further impact consumer willingness to buy counterfeit. The data indicates that two variables leave a positive impact on consumer behavior towards counterfeit. These two variables include financial incentives and previous outing. They exhibited not only positive but significant impact. On the other hand, two more variables are out there that have negative effect on consumer behavior towards counterfeit. These two variables include tendency to avoid risk and status symbol. They showed negative effects on consumer behavior towards counterfeit. The mediating variable which was being affected by all the constructs of counterfeit, consumer behavior towards counterfeit, also has some good and strong effects on consumer willingness to buy counterfeit. It was being recorded as positive.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study takes into consideration fashion products such as sunshades, cap, belt, T-shirts, jeans, suits, watches, shoes, ladies' purse, gents purse, cellular phones or gadgets, etc. These are also known as luxury fashion products. In modern era, these fashion products are the symbols of the social standings and tallness in the social circles. This study concludes that most of people who use the substitutes of the brands are of age 20 to 30 years. This age range is classified as young adults. As their ages increase, their intentions to purchase the replica products of the luxury fashion products who look like their original ones decrease with the passage of the time. So there is an inverse relationship between age and intention to buy substitutes. Research also shows that people with low incomes have more intention to get replica products. Because replica users want to make more than rational decisions by getting monetary benefits by making purchase of the substitute products instead of buying original ones. Behind these decisions of buying substitutes of the brands there are also many factors that play vital roles along with above-said factors. These parallel factors can be social standing gesturing, need for hedonic benefits and noticeable intakes. The geographic locations also matter for the intents of purchasing substitutes of the luxury fashion products. There is always a chance present that substitute of the luxury fashion products used by the aristocratic people to move further in the social society. This is the time when those brands and substitutes of these brands are producing more on large scales which are common in use.

## 6. AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIAL

All the used and generated data in this study are already presented in this article.

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