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Examining the Role of Social Media Influence on Consumer Attitudes and Purchase Intentions in India's Counterfeit Markets

Ritu Raj[1], Sunil Kumar Yadav[2] & Saurabh Verma[3]*

[1]Institute of Management, Nirma University, Ahmedabad, 382 481, India

[2]Jaypee Business School, JIIT, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201 309, India

[3]Department of Management Studies, National Institute of Technology Silchar, Assam 788 010, India

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The study provides empirical evidence on whether social media factors influence the counterfeit purchase intentions of consumers or not. The present study assumes that social media largely influences consumers' attitudes towards counterfeit products and motivates them to visit counterfeit markets intentionally. The study used primary data collected from counterfeit markets of Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. A two-part structured questionnaire consisting of demographic profiles and social media determinants was circulated among the consumers who were actually visited the counterfeit markets between February-March 2025. The study got a total of 406 valid responses, and subsequently, the collected data were analysed through PLS-SEM. The study's findings indicate that social media platform and user-generated content positively influence consumer purchase intention. However, the study found no significant relationship between social media word of mouth and purchase intention. The study also checked for the mediation effect of attitude, showing that attitude mediates the relationship between social media determinants and consumers' purchase intention towards counterfeit products.

Keywords: Counterfeit purchase intention, Demographic profiles, Social media determinants, Social media word of mouth, User-generated content

Introduction

Counterfeiting is a global phenomenon involving unlawful reproductions of a registered genuine trademark and severely threatens legitimate businesses and brands.[1] This phenomenon is now considered the most prevalent crime of the 21st century, impacting virtually all industry.[2] This Illicit practice is classified into two categories, namely deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeiting.[3] In deceptive counterfeiting, consumers are unaware that they are buying a fake item and thus purchase these products unknowingly, while in non-deceptive counterfeiting, a consumer knowingly buys a counterfeit product.[4] The consumption of non-deceptive counterfeit goods is a growing issue with detrimental economic and social consequences.[4] Furthermore, the annual report published by FICCI 2021 reported that counterfeiting is even linked with crime and terrorism.[5] Not only this, with the onset of online marketplace models, counterfeit goods have increased at an alarming rate in the past few decades.[6] Counterfeiting has grown to the extent that virtually every industry in today's world is affected by it. Given the societal and economic problems, they create, counterfeiting has emerged as a phenomenon of global significance, as it results in an estimated $4.5 trillion global trade loss.[7] Counterfeiting has spread to various categories of consumer goods, luxury goods, automotive, pharmaceutical, and industrial goods.[8] This has emerged as a global issue posing a massive threat to consumer safety and health, causing considerable losses to the nation and brand manufacturers.[9]

Counterfeiting is a global challenge with severe economic and societal consequences, expanding rapidly and showing no signs of declining.[4] Over the last 15 years, emerging economies have observed a significant shift in the practice of counterfeiting from developed economies.[10] As it is easy for counterfeit manufacturers to operate in developing economies, they are attracted by less risk and large profits. Other reasons, such as loopholes in the law, low conviction rates, slow judicial procedures, and minimal (if any) punishments, make counterfeiters more successful in these developing nations.[11] Similar situation exists in the Indian market, as the counterfeit demand is

*Author for Correspondence
E-mail: saurabhverma@mba.nits.ac.in

continuously rising, the illicit market in India across five key sectors was valued at ₹7.9 lakh crore in 2022–23, highlighting the massive scale of counterfeit and illicit goods.[5] Looking into the penetration of counterfeit products into consumers' lives, it has been observed that, knowingly or unknowingly, we are consuming these products in other forms daily. Still, there is a dearth of research studies that have explored the consequences or losses to consumers in developing countries.

Many researchers discovered that consumers' demand for these productsis one of the main reason behind the growth and existence of counterfeit goods.[8] The biggest question that may arise in finding the reason for the growth of counterfeit products in India is whether consumers knowingly buy these products. Previous studies on counterfeiting tried to work on this and found various reasons for the demand for counterfeit products by consumers[12], and classified these determinants into four categories: consumer characteristics, like materialism or gender; product attributes, like quality and price; sociocultural context, and purchase situation. However, factors like social media, which have become an essential part of today's consumers' lifestyle, have remained untouched in the counterfeiting domain. Social media has opened new communication channels for brand manufacturers and consumers.[13] The same is the case for counterfeit products, as previous reports have found that social media as a platform for selling counterfeit products is becoming very popular.[14]

In light of the above argument, it is required to further analyze the social media's effect on consumers' counterfeit purchase intention. Although literature has explored counterfeit consumption in developing economies, no comprehensive conclusions can be drawn from previous studies. Therefore, to fill this gap in the literature, this study concentrates on a key growing market, i.e., India. The study is intended to analyze the role of social media on consumers' intentions to buy non-deceptive counterfeit products. Global brands have recognized India's high potential and are increasingly entering this market; the same holds true for counterfeiters, who have also realized the market's potential. Further, despite growing work on counterfeit consumption, researchers have given limited attention to the role of social media determinants in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, particularly in developing economies. Therefore, to fill the void in the literature, the study has considered social media platform, Social Media Word of Mouth (SWoM), and user-generated content (UGC), to check the effect of these social media determinants on consumers' purchase intention towards counterfeit products. The study also analyses the impact of consumers' attitudes as a mediating variable between social media determinants and the purchase intention towards counterfeit products.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Intentions for Counterfeit Goods

Literature on counterfeit consumption suggests that price advantage over genuine products is the primary reason consumers purchase counterfeit products.[15] However, previous studies suggest that, in addition to price advantage, several determinants encourage consumers to buy counterfeit products. Some of these determinants include the ability of counterfeit products like tech-savvy, brand consciousness, brand prominence, brand personality, social norms[16], hedonic emotions, materialism and life values, ethics and materialism, post purchase, experience of pleasure, inclination towards counterfeit, product features[4], social and others. Also, some studies found factors that discourage consumers from purchasing counterfeit products; these factors include ethics, perceived risk, moral equity[4], religiosity. However, some determinants that are of great importance in today's world, like social media, are not explored that much and only a few studies, like Morra *et al*.[13] have dealt with the effect of social media on the purchase intentions of consumers.

Social Media

The term "social media" refers to websites or programmes that facilitate users to take part in social connectivity by producing or sharing content is referred to as social media.[17] Social media helps users and businesses establish relationships online.[18] With the help of this medium, firms can now raise a strong connection with their consumer base by maintaining constant two-way communication.[20] Further GlobeStat 2020 reported that after three years, this number rose to 2 billion people in 2020. Also, as per Alnsour *et al*.[19] usage of social media is forecasted to increase by 7% per year. Presently, the reach of social media is huge as the total population on social media was 5.31 billion as of early 2025, which accounts for 64.7% of the global population.[21] This meant that, globally, one in three people is active on social media. These benefits and mass reach attract counterfeiters to

use social media for their illicit products. They leverage social media's mass reach to influence consumers and aim to alter their attitudes and willingness to buy counterfeit products. The study has further elaborated on the determinants of social media use to assess their effects on counterfeit consumption.

Social Media Platform

Social media platforms can be understood as the websites that consumers use to connect with their social networks. Social media platforms come in different forms, such as social sharing, microblogging, and social reviews.[19] Social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (X) are among the most widely used digital platforms globally.[20] Since counterfeit products are illegal goods, they cannot be advertised in the media, such as TV and newspapers. However, the loopholes and adaptability of internet technology give counterfeiters a communication channel[21] Moreover, the strength of social media is increasing day by day, and that strength is across all age groups. Lilima[21] comes up with an interesting finding that earlier young consumers between the age group of 20 and 30 years had a higher subscription rate to the social media platforms, but the trend has changed recently. The senior citizens of the society are adapting to the new technology, and their subscriber rate is increasing. Also, people from all gender groups use social media, as Schivinski & Dabrowski[22] discovered that social media use among men and women was similar. So, every age group and gender is present on social media, with a wider reach, allowing counterfeiters to exploit this medium and promote their products more easily and effectively. Thus, based on the above arguments, the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: Social media platforms positively influence the purchase intention of counterfeit products

User-Generated Content (UGC)

UGC means the content that is created by consumers or users and is uploaded on social media.[23] In most cases, user-generated social mediacontent results from customer responses and feedback rather than a request from the business. Peers rely heavily on user-generated content as a source of information while making decisions.[14] Customers contribute to creating content for several reasons, such as self-promotion, desire to change public perceptions, and intrinsic enjoyment.[25] User-generated communication is considered one of the primary factors that govern consumer purchase intention. It is seen that consumers' purchase intentions are influenced by UGC rather than the content generated by the firm.[25] Similarly, user-generated content on social media platforms affects consumers' purchase intentions for counterfeit products, as it positively influences their intention to purchase counterfeit products.[14] So, this study frames the hypothesis as follows:

H2: User-generated content positively influences the purchase intention of counterfeit products.

Social Media Word of Mouth (SWoM)

Word of mouth is a powerful mode of communication that can be spread through social media platforms. These types of communication are usually held between the users, who discuss some incident, such as an event, a product, or a service, and share their experiences or views among other users on the social media platform. They are not paid by the company to promote their products, and their views are not influenced by the businesses.[24] According to Pütter[26] "SWoM interactions usually spread more quickly from one consumer to the next and can be about either positive or negative attributes of the company". Bruno and Dariusz[27] state that the communication becomes viral as it spreads quickly from one user to the next. SWoM impacts the sales of low-involvement products.[28] Khalid & Rahman[29] found that word of mouth positively influences consumers' purchase intention of counterfeit products. Further, Lilima[21] suggest that counterfeiters could use SWoM to promote their products as it positively influences the consumers' purchase intention. So, keeping in view the above arguments, the study frames the hypothesis as follows:

Mediating Role of Attitude

The theory developed by Fishbein[30] can be used to support the concept of the mediating effect of attitude. This theory says attitude is influenced by belief, which in turn affects intention. Consumers counterfeit goods. As a result, there are more possibilities to form a favorable purchase intention regarding counterfeit goods. In contrast, if the consumer has negative beliefs about the counterfeit product, they are more likely to develop negative attitudes, which result in negative purchase intentions regarding counterfeit products.[31]

There is empirical evidence in addition to theoretical justifications. Previous studies reveal that

attitudes of consumers towards the purchase of counterfeit goods mediate the relationship between product, personal, ethical, and social factors and the intention of consumers regarding the purchase of these illicit goods'.[16] However, only a few studies have looked into the role of attitude in mediating the relationship between social media factors and consumer intention to purchase counterfeit goods. Interrelationship among various factors influencing consumer attitude can be seen from Fig. 1. Therefore, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H4: Consumers' attitude mediates the relationship between social media platforms and the purchase intention of counterfeit products.

H5: Consumers' attitude mediates the relationship between user-generated content and the purchase intention of counterfeit products.

H6: Consumers' attitude act as a mediating construct in the relationship between social media word-of-mouth and the purchase intention of counterfeit products

Research Methodology

Measurement of Variables

All the scales used in the study are adopted from previous research. A four-item scale adapted fromWang *et al*.[15] was used to measure purchase intention. Scale for the attitude was borrowed from Bian and Veloutsou (2007) and Augusto de Matos *et al*. (2007).[32,33] Social media determinants that include social media platform, user-generated content, and SWoM were also measured using adapted scales in which social media platform and SWoM were measured using a scale that was adapted from Ramsunder (2011).[19] However, user-generated content was measured using the adopted scales from Morra *et al*. (2018) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016).[14,22] All the scales used in the study are listed in Table 1. To assess each statement in the questionnaire, a five-point likert scale with responses ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree" was used.

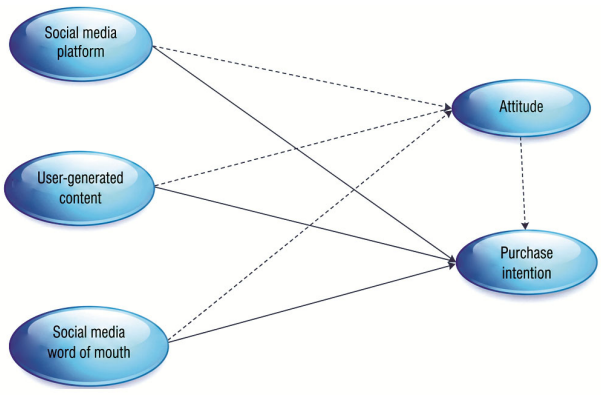

Fig. 1 — Interrelationship among various factors influencing consumer attitude

Location of the Study

Primary research was conducted to collect the required information with the help of a survey questionnaire. The counterfeit fashion products were considered for the study. The study was carried out in three metropolitan cities of India: Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. The reason behind the selection of these cities (Palika Bazaar and Tank Road market of Delhi, Kidderpore market of Kolkata, and Heera Panna market of Mumbai) were reported as notorious markets in India (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2021). There is a wide range of branded and counterfeit products, like clothing, footwear, bags, toys, watches, accessories, electronic devices, and other counterfeit fashion products, available in these markets.

Data Collection

The study employed non-probability sampling, to be specific, purposive sampling.The study used purposive sampling which is advantageous as it allows for the theoretical generalization of the results obtained.[34] Purposive sampling is applied because only counterfeit consumers of fashion products need to be chosen as the sample for in-depth exploration and focused analysis of counterfeit consumption behavior. The Cochran formula was used for the sample size; according to that, 385 samples were needed. The required primary data were collected in an offline mode through the survey questionnaires. The study obtained 406 valid responses for data analysis. The data for the study were collected February- March 2025. The respondents selected for data collection were young adults who had attained the age of 18 years. The rationality behind this selection is that they are independent, have purchasing power, are aware of the business environment, and can make decisions on their own. In totality, 627 survey questionnaires were distributed out of which 472 were received, and finally, 406 responses were found to be valid for further analysis. The analysis was carried out using SmartPLS4.

Profile of the Respondents

The sample consists of 406 consumers, out of which 300 are male, which constitutes 74% of the

Table 1 — Loadings and reliability of the items

Items	Loadings	VIF	Alpha	CR	AVE
Attitude			0.841	0.887	0.612
"ATT1: Considering price, I prefer counterfeit market goods.	0.756	1.812			
ATT2: I like shopping for counterfeit market goods.	0.826	2.13			
ATT3: Buying counterfeit fashion products generally benefits the consumer.	0.819	1.953			
ATT4: There is nothing wrong with purchasing counterfeit products.	0.752	1.786			
ATT5: Generally speaking, buying counterfeit fashion products is a better choice."	0.756	1.722			
Purchase Intention			0.815	0.879	0.648
"PI1: I would think about a counterfeit product as a choice when buying something.	0.819	1.933			
PI2: I will buy counterfeit products.	0.877	2.261			
PI3: I would recommend counterfeit products to friends and family.	0.849	2.009			
PI4: I will buy counterfeit products from peddlers."	0.658	1.368			
Social media platform			0.704	0.817	0.532
"SP1: There are social media platforms that make me buy counterfeit products	0.822	1.61			
SP2: I vary my likeness of counterfeit products depending on the type of social media used.	0.822	1.632			
SP3: I do not buy anything advertised on any social media platform.	0.568	1.203			
SP4: Not all counterfeit products appeal the same if promoted using different social media platforms."	0.674	1.206			
User-generated Content			0.782	0.859	0.605
"UGC1: I am satisfied with the content generated on SM sites by other users about the counterfeit fashion products	0.750	1.461			
UGC2: The level of content generated on SM sites by other users about counterfeit fashion products meets my expectations.	0.828	1.735			
UGC3: The content generated by other users about counterfeit fashion products is very attractive	0.785	1.579			
UGC4: The content generated on SM sites by other users about counterfeit fashion products performs well when compared with other products."	0.756	1.443			
Social Media Word of Mouth			0.802	0.872	0.633
"SWoM1: When I buy these products, the online reviews on the product are helpful in my decision-making.	0.646	1.298			
SWoM2: Social media referral affects my decision to buy fashion counterfeit products.	0.848	2.15			
SWoM3: Social media likes influence me to buy fashion counterfeit products.	0.862	2.289			
SWoM4: I consider viral posts on social media when making a decision to buy these counterfeit products."	0.808	1.763			

Source: Author's Own Contribution

total sample, and the remaining106, which is 26% of the sample, are female. The majority of respondents belong to the age bracket of 21 to 30 years, as it constitutes 52% of the total sample, which is about 212 consumers. The majority of consumers are educated, as 45% consumers are graduates, 33% of consumers have an education level of post-graduation and above, and only 22% of consumers have an education level of high school or less. The majority of respondents are unmarried, as 71% of them are unmarried, 27% are married, and the remaining 2% are separated. As far as income is concerned, the majority of consumers belong to the bracket of monthly disposable income above 30,000, as this bracket constitutes roughly 41% of total respondents.

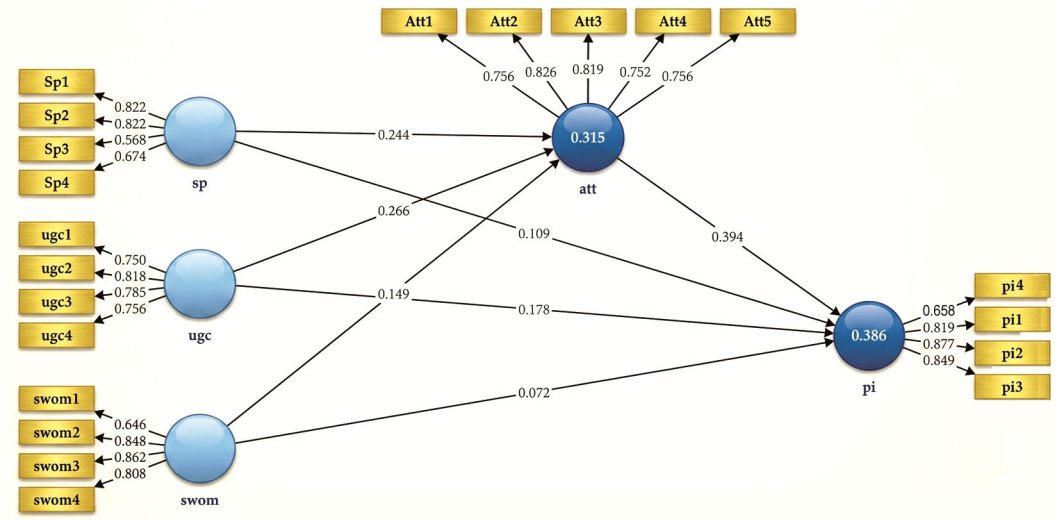

Fig. 2 — Research Model derived from PLS SEM

Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical research standards. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose and nature of the study before providing their responses. No personal identifying information was collected, and anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were ensured throughout the research process. The data were used solely for academic purposes, and respondents had the option to decline participation at any stage.

Results

The study used SmartPLS 4 software in order to validate the proposed model.[36] The study followed a two-stage analytical approach, as suggested by Hair *et al.*[35]suggest that evaluation in PLS-SEM (Fig. 2) should be done in two steps, which involves separate evaluation of measurement and structural model

Measurement Model

The reliability and validity are determined for the measurement model. The values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability of constructs are depicted in Table 1. It is clearly seen that the values are within the threshold limits.[35] The close range of loadings establishes the constructs' convergence validity.[36] The item loadings of all the constructs are given in Table 1, which fulfil the requirements for convergent validity.[37] The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct were found to surpass the benchmark value of 0.5[(38)], thereby confirming convergent validity of the scales used in the study.

Table 2 — Fornell-larcker criterion

	Att	PI	SP	SWoM	UGC
Attitude	0.782				
Purchase intention	0.566	0.805			
Social media platform	0.468	0.428	0.73		
Social media word of mouth	0.46	0.431	0.551	0.795	
User generated content	0.495	0.479	0.533	0.663	0.778

Source: Author's Own Contribution

Table 3 — HTMT

	Att	PI	SP	SWoM	UGC
Attitude					
Purchase intention	0.678				
Social media platform	0.598	0.543			
Social media word of mouth	0.556	0.527	0.706		
User generated content	0.607	0.598	0.709	0.834	

Source: Author's Own Contribution

The study used the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT for discriminant validity. It can be seen from Table 2 that the square root of each constructs AVE is higher than its correlations with other constructs, indicating that the construct fulfils the requirement of discriminant validity.[39] From the construct's HTMT value as given in Table 3 it can be observed that all values are less than 0.85. To check the potential collinearity issue, the study has considered the VIF value. SWoM has the highest VIF value for the structural model, at 2.289, while the VIF values for the remaining constructs are all under 0.5[(40)] Thus, collinearity is not an issue among exogenous variables.

Structural Model

Stage 2 of the PLS-SEM analyses of the predictive abilities of the structural model. The study used a

bootstrapping algorithm with 5000 samples to examine the significance of path coefficients (Table 4). Coefficients of determination, i.e., R^2 values for the variables attitude of consumer and counterfeit fashion product purchase intention are 0.315 and 0.386, respectively, which means that the values of R^2 fall between moderate to high range levels in the context of this study.[37] The study used the Geisser-Stone Q^2 value to assess the predictive accuracy of the model.[41,42] The study got the Q^2 values of the endogenous variables, attitude, and purchase intention by the procedure of blindfolding. The study got the values of Q^2 as 0.186 and 0.244 for the variables attitude and purchase intention, respectively, which means these exhibits predictive relevance as the values are above zero, as shown in Table 5. The study used Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) to assess the model fit. The analysis gave the value of SRMR as 0.063, which is below the threshold value of 0.08[(43),] demonstrating an acceptable model fit.

In addition to evaluating the goodness of fit, the study assessed the hypotheses to examine the significance of the relationship. H1 evaluates the relationship between social media platforms and consumers' purchase intention, and the results revealed that there is a significant relationship between social media platforms and consumers' counterfeit purchase intention ($\beta = 0.109$, $t = 1.975$, $p<0.05$). Hence, H1 was accepted. H2 evaluates the relationship between UGC and the counterfeit purchase intention of consumers, and the results revealed that there is a significant relationship between UGC and counterfeit purchase intention of consumers ($\beta = 0.178$, $t = 2.678$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, H2 was accepted. H3 evaluates the relationship between SWoM and the purchase intention, and the results revealed that there is an insignificant relationship between SWoM and the purchase intention of consumers towards counterfeit products ($\beta = 0.072$, $t = 1.302$, $p >0.05$). Hence, H3 was not supported, as depicted in Table 4.

Table 4 — Path Coefficient

	β	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values
Social Media Platform -> Purchase Intention	0.109	0.055	1.975	0.049
User Generated content -> Purchase Intention	0.178	0.067	2.678	0.008
Social Media Word of Mouth -> Purchase Intention	0.072	0.053	1.359	0.175

Source: Author's Own Contribution

Table 5 — Coefficient of determinant & Prediction Relevance

	R^2	Q^2
Attitude	0.315	0.186
Purchase Intention	0.386	0.244

Source: Author's Own Contribution

Mediation Analysis

The study performed a mediation analysis to evaluate the mediating role of consumers' attitudes on the linkage between social media determinants and counterfeit purchase intention by bootstrapping the sampling distribution of indirect effects. The study revealed that social media platforms' total effect (Table 6) on counterfeit purchase intention was significant ($\beta = 0.205$, $t = 3.263$, $p <0.05$). After the inclusion of attitude as a mediating variable, the direct effect of social media platforms on counterfeit purchase intention is still significant ($\beta = 0.109$, $t = 1.975$, $p < 0.05$). Also, the indirect effect (Table 7) of social media platforms on the purchase intention of counterfeit products was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.96$, $t = 2.992$, < 0.05). This shows that attitude partially mediates the relationship between social media platforms and counterfeit purchase intention.[44] Hence, H4 was supported. Similarly, H5 evaluates the mediating relationship of attitude between UGC and counterfeit purchase intention.The findings revealed (Table 6) the total effect of UGC on counterfeit purchase intention was significant ($\beta = 0.283$, $t = 4.474$, $p < 0.05$). After the inclusion of attitude as a mediating variable, the direct effect of UGC on counterfeit purchase intention is still significant ($\beta = 0.178$, $t = 2.678$, $p < 0.05$). Also, the indirect effect (Table 7) of UGC on the purchase intention of counterfeit products was significant ($\beta = 0.105$, $t = 3.355$, $p < 0.05$). This shows that attitude partially mediates the relationship between UGC and counterfeit purchase intention. Hence, H5 was supported. Similarly, H6 evaluates the mediating relationship of attitude between SWoM and counterfeit purchase intention.The findings revealed (Table 6) the total effect of SWoM on counterfeit purchase intention was significant ($\beta = 0.130$, $t = 2.059$, $p < 0.05$). After the inclusion of attitude as a mediating variable, the direct effect of SWoM on counterfeit purchase intention became insignificant ($\beta = 0.072$, $t = 1.359$, $p> 0.05$). However, the indirect effect (Table 7) of SWoM on the purchase intention of counterfeit products was found to be significant ($\beta=0.059$, $t = 2.038$, $p < 0.05$). This shows that

Table 6 — Total effect and direct effect

	Total effect			Direct effect		
	β	T values	P values	β	T values	P Values
SP-> PI	0.205	3.263	0.001	0.109	1.975	0.049
UGC-> PI	0.283	4.474	0	0.178	2.678	0.008
SWOM-> PI	0.130	2.059	0.04	0.072	1.359	0.175

Source: Author's Own Contribution

Table 7 — Specific Indirect Effect of Attitude

	Indirect effect of attitude			
	β	SD	T value	P value
SP -> ATT-> PI	0.096	0.032	2.992	0.003
UGC->ATT->PI	0.105	0.031	3.355	0.001
SWOM->ATT->PI	0.059	0.029	2.038	0.042

Source: Author's Own Contribution

attitude fully mediates the relationship between SWoM and counterfeit purchase intention.[44] Hence, H6 was supported.

Discussion

This study aims to look into the social media determinants that influence consumers' intentions to buy counterfeits in the Indian counterfeit market. The research focuses on the Indian context, a nation with a significant growth rate in purchasing luxury goods and an equivalent rise in the consumption of counterfeit products. The present study assumes that social media largely influences consumers' attitudes towards counterfeit products and motivates them to visit counterfeit markets intentionally. This assumption was found to be true as the present study offers novel insights into how social media factors affect consumers' counterfeit purchase intentions in a developing economy. Drawing on inference from previous studies like Quoquab *et al*.[16] which highlights that there exists a positive relation between the attitude and purchase intention of consumers towards counterfeit products. Similar findings were provided by a study Raj *et al*.[44,46] stating that counterfeit consumption behavior is a cognitive process in which consumers' favorable attitude is facilitated by consumers' perception, followed by purchase intention to buy counterfeit products in India. This study further provides evidence of the importance of consumers' attitudes in influencing their purchase intentions towards counterfeit products by examining their mediating effect.

The study's findings provide important theoretical insights into the role of social media in shaping consumer behaviour toward counterfeit products. The results suggest that social media serves as an important external informational factor that influences consumer attitudes, which, in turn, affect purchase intention. This supports behavioural theories that emphasise the importance of attitudinal evaluation in the decision-making process. By demonstrating that social media determinants influence purchase intention primarily through attitude, the study highlights the critical role of cognitive and evaluative mechanisms in explaining counterfeit consumption. This finding strengthens the theoretical understanding of how digital communication environments contribute to consumer decision-making beyond other factors like product-related and socio-economic factors and others.

The study found that social media platform influences consumer purchase intention towards counterfeits. The finding suggests that counterfeiters are effective in using different social media platforms as a platform to sell their illicit products and concurs with the finding of Kennedy *et al*.[45] The study reported that social media platforms are helping consumers in changing their perception regarding counterfeit products, and especially have a great influence on younger generations. The results of the study support the findings of a report published by FICCI CASCADE in 2021[(5)], which says that social media as a platform for selling counterfeit products is becoming very popular. Social media platforms have provided counterfeiters with the means to reach a fresh wave of consumers, along with additional channels to showcase their illegal products to the public.

User-generated content is found to be the second determinant of the study, and it was observed that it influences consumer purchase intention towards these illicit items. This is in accordance with previous research suggesting that user-generated social media communication impacts consumers' intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products. Additionally, the results of the study also concur with the findings of Morra *et al.*[13] that social media user opinions significantly affect consumers as they impact the willingness to own a particular brand, making them more likely to purchase counterfeit goods.

Lastly, in contrast to what the study predicted, the study found that SWoM does not influence the purchase intention of consumers regarding counterfeits. This finding is in contrast with what Mir and Anwar[20] found in their study that word of mouth positively impacts consumer intention to purchase

counterfeit products. The reason for this contrast can be that consumers might not find SWoM as organic and reliable in the case of counterfeit products in the Indian context. However, the findings of the study also show that attitude has a mediating effect between SWoM and the purchase intention of consumers.

Theoretical and Practical Contribution

This research makes significant contributions to both theory and practice. This study contributes to theory by extending the understanding of counterfeit consumption beyond contextual examination and positioning social media determinants within a behavioural intention framework. While previous research has primarily focused on product-related determinants, ethical considerations, and socio-demographic antecedents, the present study identifies social media platforms and user-generated content as important factors influencing consumer attitudes and, in turn, shaping purchase intentions. Furthermore, the findings on social media word-of-mouth (SWoM) offer important theoretical insights. Although SWoM did not directly influence purchase intention, its indirect effect through attitude highlights the role of cognitive evaluation in consumer decision-making. This suggests that consumers interpret and assess social media communication before forming purchase intentions, which is consistent with behavioural theories that emphasise the mediating role of attitude.

Practically, the Indian counterfeit market has been used in this study to test the direct and indirect relationships. The study is relevant to the current marketing scenario, as it helps brand manufacturers and marketers understand social media's effectiveness. Then, they can accordingly develop effective strategies and policies to influence consumers' attitudes towards counterfeit consumption. Marketers should work with the government and anti-counterfeiting agencies, monitor social media, and take action to control and reduce counterfeit consumption. The study can help educate consumers about the presence of counterfeiters on social media. To ensure improved behaviour from the current and upcoming generations that will improve and enhance life quality in India, it is strongly advised that the country's decision-makers, legislators, and government implement ethical beliefs and values through the university, college, and school-level educational system. Furthermore, private and public organisations can organise seminars, conferences, and talks to address the phenomenon of counterfeiting and devise strategies to help control and mitigate its effects.

Conclusions

The study provides empirical evidence on whether social media factors influence the counterfeit purchase intentions of consumers or not. The study's findings indicate that social media platforms and user-generated content positively influence consumer purchase intention. The study also checked for the mediation effect of attitude and revealed that attitude mediates the relationship between social media determinants and consumers' purchase intention towards counterfeit products. The study has some limitations, such as the study was conducted in India, which has a large population, and the results are from a cross-sectional study. Also, the study considered only demand-side factors that influence the consumption of these counterfeits. Future studies may examine supply-side factors contributing to the demand for these counterfeits. Further, the study has limited coverage, as it examines only counterfeit fashion goods. Future studies can consider other sectors such as the automobile, fast-moving consumer goods, and electronics. The study acknowledges that some of the effects it found may vary depending on cultural, political orientations, and situational factors.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The dataset is not publicly available to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents.

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