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Fake-love: brand love for counterfeits

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Abstract

Purpose – Recent studies have indicated that consumers who knowingly purchase counterfeits could be in love with the brands whose counterfeits they own. Arguably, this love may not be the same as the love felt by individuals who purchase the original brand. Research in this field has not studied how these two love types differ in its genesis and consequences. Therefore, the paper aims to discuss this issue and intends to fill this gap.

Design/methodology/approach – This study performed a multi-group analysis using (PLS-SEM) between two groups of customers (real-buyers and fake-buyers) to elucidate the factors that separate fake-love from real-love. This study adopted a combination of convenience sampling and field visits to identify 500 individuals who were classified as either real-buyers or fake-buyers.

Findings – The relationship between social-self and brand love is significantly stronger for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers. However, the relationship between inner-self and brand love is significantly stronger in the case of real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers. Real-buyers tend to be more brand resilient than fake-buyers as their love emanates primarily from the inner-self. Additionally, fake-buyers indulge in +WOM more than real-buyers as their brand love emanates from the social-self.

Originality/value – This is the first study to explore the concept of brand love among consumers who purchase counterfeits in spite of being able to afford the original brands. This is also the first study that is focused on identifying the antecedents and outcomes that separate real-love from fake-love.

Keywords Counterfeiting, Brand love, Fake-love, Self-expressiveness

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Fournier (1998) suggested that consumers have a tendency to ascribe human-like characteristics to their brands, leading to the formation of an emotional attachment. A strong emotional attachment can lead to a love-like feeling toward their brands (Albert *et al.*, 2008). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) defined brand love as "the degree of passionate, emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name." This phenomenon has inspired different studies to understand its antecedents and consequences (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Roy *et al.*, 2016).

Wallace *et al.* (2014) have demonstrated that the ability of a brand to significantly enhance its users' self-identity is an important antecedent to brand love. Additionally, past research has demonstrated that brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998), positive word of mouth (+WOM) (Albert *et al.*, 2008), and propensity to forgive brand failures (Bauer *et al.*, 2009) are some of the outcomes of brand love.

However, the popularity of a brand, combined with a high price can lead to counterfeiting (Commuri, 2009). Counterfeits try to sponge off the popularity of real-brands. Counterfeits that are exact replicas manage to deceive consumers into believing that they are real. However, consumers often purposely purchase counterfeit brands (Gentry *et al.*, 2001) as they believe that the possession of "luxury" brands will help them in attaining a higher social status (Commuri, 2009). Therefore, counterfeits of luxury brands are perceived to be capable of shaping consumers' self-identity (Castaño and Perez, 2014), which can lead to a love-like feeling toward the brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Additionally, Jiang and Cova (2012) pointed out that individuals who knowingly purchase counterfeits also develop a

passion for the brand, express themselves through these brands, feel discomfort if seen without it, and feel that it projects dimensions of their identity.

Therefore, consumers who knowingly purchase counterfeits could also be in love with the corresponding real-brands. Castaño and Perez (2014) supported this contention by demonstrating that consumers who knowingly purchase counterfeits (referred to as fake-buyers) also develop a love-like feeling toward the real-brands (referred to as fake-love). Arguably, this fake-love may not be the same as the love felt by a real-buyer (referred to as real-love). Previous research has not studied how these two love types differ in its antecedents and consequences. Therefore, this study intends to fill this gap.

Despite extensive research in the field of counterfeiting (Commuri, 2009; Jiang and Cova, 2012) and brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Roy *et al.*, 2016), the antecedents and outcomes of fake-love have remained largely unexplored. Roux *et al.* (2017) have suggested that understanding the motivation behind the purchase of luxury brands helps in understanding the customer-brand relationship. Kaufmann *et al.* (2016), argued that understanding of customer-brand relationships will help in identifying the factors that lead to counterfeit buying behavior, and developing strategies to curb it. This research attempts to address this gap through a multi-group analysis (MGA) between two groups of customers (real-buyers and fake-buyers), and tries to elucidate the factors that separate fake-love from real-love. This is the first study that explores how the two components of self-expressiveness (inner and social) of a brand influence the two love types. Furthermore, this is also the first study that explores how these two love types differentially influence +WOM and resilience toward negative brand information (referred to as brand resilience).

This study contributes in understanding of the socio-psychological motivations behind brand love's inception. The findings suggest that real-buyers as well as fake-buyers love the original brand. However, real-love originates from a brand's ability to enhance consumers' inner as well as social-self whereas fake-love originates from its ability to enhance their social-self. If consumers love a brand only for its ability to enhance their social-self, then buying its counterfeit is a viable option. However, if consumers love a brand for its quality and authenticity, which also enhances their inner-self, then they will prefer the real-brand. The findings of this study suggest that managers must focus on emphasizing the importance of inner self-expressiveness in their communication strategies to dissuade consumers from buying counterfeits.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: The literature review covers the factors that are responsible for counterfeiting, and fake-love, which sets the context for the hypotheses development. This leads to the research method and the results of the hypotheses testing. The article concludes with the general discussion, implications, limitations, and avenues for future research.

Literature review
Counterfeits
The popularity of a brand is one of the prime reasons for its counterfeiting. Counterfeits, illegally, imitate the original brand so that the items appear as genuine (Ang *et al.*, 2001). Jiang and Cova (2012) defined counterfeiting "as the production of copies that are identically packaged, including trademarks and labeling, so as to seem to a consumer that the item is the genuine article." This study uses the word "fake" to refer counterfeit items.

In recent years, counterfeiting has grown tremendously, which has posed a worldwide economic problem (Castaño and Perez, 2014). Consumers who are deceived into purchasing counterfeits may be dissatisfied due to their poor quality, which can hamper the corresponding real-brands' image, and demand (Commuri, 2009).

Baghi *et al.* (2016) have posited that identifying the factors that motivate consumers in choosing counterfeits will help us in curbing its demand. Previous research has focused on

consumers' motivation to purchase counterfeits due to its cost effectiveness and social conformity (Wilcox *et al.*, 2009). However, Castaño and Perez (2014) indicated that individuals who can afford real-brands may also indulge in purchasing counterfeits. They demonstrated that these individuals also develop a love-like feeling toward the corresponding real-brands. Therefore, factors like consumer-brand relationships which are beyond cost effectiveness may boost the demand for counterfeits (Stöttinger and Penz, 2015).

Fake-buyers and fake-love

The possession of luxury brands is considered to be a status symbol due to their premium price (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). Consumers have a tendency of being attached to luxury brands due to the emotional aspect associated with them, eventually forming a consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998). Brand love is a result of an intense emotional and passionate attachment toward a brand (Ahuvia, 2005). Batra *et al.* (2012) posited that love for a brand leads to "passion driven behavior, self-brand integration, positive emotional connect, long-term relationship, and anticipated separation distress." Furthermore, brand love also leads to +WOM and brand acceptance (Wallace *et al.*, 2014).

Consumers who cannot afford genuine luxury brands may feel the need to be associated with them in order to enhance their social standing. Jiang and Cova (2012) demonstrated that the underlying reason for the purchase of counterfeits is "conformity, status seeking and face consciousness." Consumers purchase counterfeits as they are concerned about their image in the society. They believe that the possession of luxury brands can help them in enhancing their identity by appearing to be an affluent consumer.

However, a lack of sufficient income may not be the only reason behind the purchase of counterfeits (Bian and Moutinho, 2011). Consumers purchase counterfeits as a trial to test if its association enhances their social status before buying real-brands. Additionally, the experience of shopping for counterfeits can be a source of joy, and provide them the satisfaction of being a smart shopper. Furthermore, the propensity to purchase counterfeits increases in the presence of friends who indulge in it.

Bian and Moutinho (2011) demonstrated that the image of a brand is a major reason behind knowingly purchasing its counterfeit as fake-buyers value brand image over actual product attributes. Additionally, Castaño and Perez (2014) showed that fake-buyers transfer the perceived symbolic personality traits of the real-brands to their counterfeits.

Therefore, counterfeits are expected to possess greater hedonic value than utilitarian value, as they may perform lesser but appear genuine (Castaño and Perez, 2014). As per Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), the hedonic value and self-expressiveness of a brand are antecedents to brand love. Additionally, the transfer of perceived symbolic personality traits of the real-brands to their counterfeits can lead to fake-love as the desired brand personality is an antecedent to brand love (Roy *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, consumers get emotionally attached, and develop a passionate consumer-brand relationship with the fake-brands due to their experiences with them (Jiang and Cova, 2012).

Such a relationship may lead to a feeling of love toward the original brand whose counterfeit they possess. Castaño and Perez (2014) supported this contention by studying fake-love in the case of consumers who purchased originals as well as counterfeits of a particular brand. They showed that there is a difference between the love for real and fake-brands. This study explores the difference between real-love and fake-love in the case of individuals who exclusively purchase either one of the two.

Hypotheses development

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) demonstrated that the self-expressiveness of a brand is an antecedent to brand love. They defined self-expressiveness of a brand as "the consumer's perception of the degree to which the specific brand enhances one's social-self and/or

reflects one's inner self." They divided self-expressiveness into two components: inner self-expressiveness and social self-expressiveness.

Vigneron and Johnson (1999) posited that luxury brands provide personal as well as inter-personal utility to their consumers. The personal utility is present due to the hedonic aspect attached to the luxury items that help consumers in fulfilling their inner goals (Jiang and Cova, 2012). Consumers form relationships with brands in order to grow and progress by incorporating some of the brand qualities into their sense of self, which helps them in conceptualizing their self-identity (Aron and Aron, 1986). Therefore, possession of luxury brands leads to the enhancement of their inner-self. Additionally, the inter-personal utility is present due to the ability of the luxury brands in projecting a higher social status (Lascu and Zinkhan, 1999). This leads to the enhancement of their social-self. Therefore, original luxury brands are capable of enhancing consumers' inner as well as social-self.

On the other hand, a consumer who knowingly purchases counterfeits is aware of their lower functional aspects like quality and reliability (Wilcox et al., 2009). Therefore, the value associated with fake-brands is lower than that of real-brands. Evidently, incorporation of the brand qualities in the consumers' sense of self happens to a lesser degree in the case of counterfeits (as compared to real-brands) (Perez et al., 2010). This hinders the ability of counterfeits to enhance consumers' inner-self. This brings us to the first hypothesis:

> *H1.* The relationship between inner self-expressiveness and brand love will be stronger for real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers.

Counterfeits that are exact replicas of luxury brands will enable fake-buyers in projecting a higher social status, thus enhancing their social-self. They serve as a "value-expressive function" for consumers who do not care about the authenticity of the brands (Bian et al., 2016; Eisend et al., 2017). This brings us to the second hypothesis:

> *H2.* The relationship between social self-expressiveness and brand love will be stronger for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers.

Previous research has demonstrated that self-expressiveness of a brand increases consumers' tendency to recommend it to others, leading to a +WOM (Angelis et al., 2012). Consumers offer +WOM if the brand meaning is congruent with their inner-self, which implies that inner self-expressiveness is responsible for +WOM (Wallace et al., 2014). However, the incorporation of a brand's qualities in the consumers' sense of self happens to a much lesser degree in the case of counterfeits (Perez et al., 2010). Therefore, as compared to counterfeits, real-brands will largely enable consumers in expressing their inner-self. This brings us to the third hypothesis:

> *H3.* The relationship between inner self-expressiveness and +WOM will be stronger for real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers.

Real-buyers purchase original brands to express their inner as well as social-self (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore, +WOM emanates from the brand's ability to express their inner as well as social-self. On the other hand, fake-buyers purchase counterfeits, largely, to express their social-self (Commuri, 2009). They offer +WOM to establish their association with a luxury brand, which may enable them in projecting a higher social status. This brings us to the fourth hypothesis:

> *H4.* The relationship between social self-expressiveness and +WOM will be stronger for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers.

Brand resilience is the propensity to forgive wrongdoings by a brand (Du et al., 2007). An actively engaged consumer is likely to forgive wrongdoings by a brand (Du et al., 2007).

Therefore, self-expressiveness of a brand leads to brand resilience (Wallace *et al.*, 2014). Consumers purchase real-brands to enhance their social as well as inner-self (Jiang and Cova, 2012). Since real-buyers' inner-self is associated with their brand, it will be difficult for them to give up on their brands due to negative brand information. On the other hand, counterfeits are not high on the inner self-expressiveness component hence fake-buyers will be willing to give up on the brand due to negative brand-related information. This brings us to the fifth hypothesis:

H5. The relationship between inner self-expressiveness and brand resilience will be stronger for real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers.

Fake-buyers purchase counterfeits to enhance their social-self (Perez *et al.*, 2010). A negative brand-related information may urge them to stop associating with it as it may hamper their image. Real-buyers' social status is also contingent on their brand's reputation; however, their brand association is not purely dependent on the social self-expressiveness component. This brings us to the sixth hypothesis:

H6. The relationship between social self-expressiveness and brand resilience will be stronger (inversely) for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers.

Batra *et al.* (2012) posited that brand love explains variation in consumers' "positive WOM and resistance to negative information about the brand." Castaño and Perez (2014) demonstrated that there is a difference between the love felt by real-buyers and fake-buyers. Fake-love is influenced, largely, by the social self-expressiveness component. In order to declare their association with a reputed brand, fake-buyers indulge in talking about the "luxury" brands that they possess. Their fake-love will lead to a greater +WOM as compared to real-buyers who love the brand as it enhances their inner as well as social-self. This brings us to the seventh hypothesis:

H7. The relationship between brand love and +WOM will be stronger for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers.

Previous research has demonstrated that brand love leads to brand resilience (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Fake-buyers may abandon their brands due to negative brand-related information as their association with it may hamper their image. On the other hand, in addition to the enhancement of the social status, real-love also emanates from the brand's ability to enhance the inner-self. Real-buyers develop an emotional attachment to the brand that transcends beyond the inflation of their social status. Therefore, real-buyers may not be willing to give up on their brands even in the presence of negative brand-related information. This brings us to the eighth hypotheses:

H8. The relationship between brand love and brand resilience will be stronger for real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers.

Research method

Sample and data collection

There is a steady increase in the consumption of luxury products and their counterfeits in emerging markets like India (Shukla and Purani, 2012). Therefore, Indian cities were considered to be ideal for this study.

Since fashion brands carry a higher degree of symbolic and hedonic appeal (Castaño and Perez, 2014), this product category (apparel, eyewear, shoes, handbags and watches) was used for this study. The data for the two groups were collected from individuals who either owned an original or a counterfeit (and not both) of luxury brands for at least six months. This criterion helped in recruiting participants who had a considerable experience of using

that product. In India, individuals belonging to the higher economic strata of SEC A (socio-economic class) are the major consumers of genuine luxury brands (Jain *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, respondents from SEC A were selected to eliminate income as a reason behind choosing counterfeits. At last, to remove the effects of deceptive counterfeiting, participants who had unknowingly purchased counterfeits were excluded.

Due to the peculiarities of the design, this study adopted a combination of convenience sampling and field visits. A snowball sampling technique through personal contacts was used since this method is suitable for studies dealing with counterfeiting (Wang and Song, 2013). Additionally, participants were recruited from local counterfeit markets in exchange for a gift.

The minimum sample size required for each group, based on the desired power level of 0.8 and anticipated effect size of 0.1 was 233. However, other studies have suggested that the minimum sample size can be based on the desired statistical power (Hair *et al.*, 2014). This study adopted a technique called G*Power which suggested a sample size of 250 to attain a statistical power of 0.95 (Faul *et al.*, 2009). After discarding 78 inadequate responses, the data consisted of 500 (250 for each group) responses, which was above the required limit.

Measures
The items developed by Wallace *et al.* (2014) were used to measure both the self-expressiveness components. Brand love and +WOM were measured with the scale developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The items for brand resilience were adapted from Bhattacharya and Sen. All the items consisted of seven-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Table I presents these scales.

The self-reported behavioral and attitudinal data collected at a point in time can have errors like the common method bias (Chang *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it was ensured that the participants understood the questions as well as the confidentiality of the survey. Additionally, "Harman's single factor test" and the "single-method-factor approach" (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) indicated that the common method bias was not an issue.

Results
Model assessment using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)
To assess the proposed model, SmartPLS 3.2.4 was used to perform PLS-SEM and MGA (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). PLS-SEM, simultaneously, allows the examination of all the relationships between variables, including the measurement and structural components, in a conceptual model. Additionally, due to its non-parametric approach, it is considered to be highly appropriate for MGA (Henseler *et al.*, 2016).

The proposed model for real and fake-buyers was tested in two steps: the measurement model and the structural model (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The study assessed the measurement model, structural model, and MGA by using two different non-parametric methods: Henseler's MGA (Henseler *et al.*, 2009a) and the permutation test (Chin and Dibbern, 2010).

Assessment of measurement model
The loading of each indicator on its associated latent variable (LV), in both the groups, was above the threshold value of 0.7, suggesting that the indicators were reliable (Hair *et al.*, 2011). Table I presents these results. Furthermore, for both the groups, the composite reliability coefficients for all LVs were above 0.7, suggesting acceptable construct reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the measurement model possessed acceptable reliability.

Table I shows that the average variance extracted of all the LVs was above 0.5, which indicated a high convergent validity. The discriminant validity of the measurement

Construct	Real-buyers			Fake-buyers		
	Loading	AVE	CR	Loading	AVE	CR
Inner-self expressiveness						
This brand symbolises the kind of person I really am inside	0.85	0.68	0.90	0.77	0.62	0.87
This brand reflects my personality	0.84			0.80		
This brand is an extension of my inner self	0.79			0.77		
This brand mirrors the real me	0.82			0.83		
Social-self expressiveness						
This brand contributes to my image	0.79	0.68	0.89	0.78	0.67	0.89
This brand adds to the social "role" I play	0.82			0.80		
This brand has a positive impact on what others think of me	0.89			0.84		
This brand improves the way society views me	0.79			0.86		
Brand love						
This is a wonderful brand	0.85	0.60	0.94	0.83	0.65	0.95
This brand makes me feel good	0.83			0.82		
This brand is totally awesome	0.77			0.78		
I have neutral feelings about this brand (*R)	0.75			0.76		
This brand makes me very happy	0.77			0.82		
I love this brand!	0.71			0.83		
I have no particular feelings about this brand (*R)	0.83			0.76		
This brand is a pure delight	0.76			0.81		
I am passionate about this brand	0.79			0.79		
I am very attached to this brand	0.70			0.83		
+WOM						
I have recommended this brand to lots of people	0.82	0.68	0.90	0.86	0.73	0.88
I 'talk up' this brand to my friends	0.82			0.85		
I try to spread the good-word about this brand	0.81			0.85		
I give this brand tons of positive word-of-mouth advertising	0.86			0.85		
Resilience to negative information						
If [brand X] did something I didn't like, I would be willing to give it another chance	0.90	0.81	0.93	0.85	0.76	0.91
I will disregard any negative information that I hear or read about [brand X]	0.89			0.88		
I will forgive [brand X] when it makes mistakes	0.90			0.90		

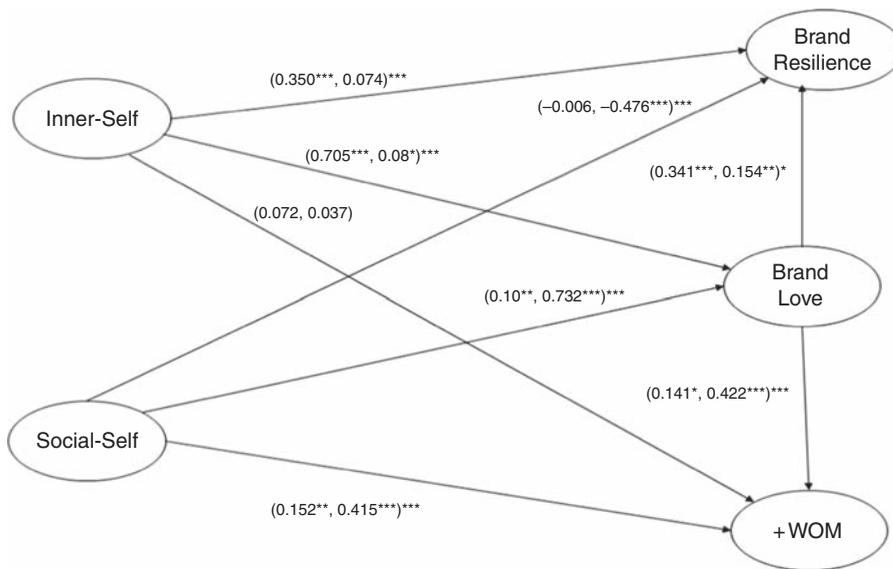**Notes:** CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted

Table I.
Scales and results of measurement model

model was established based on Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair *et al.*, 2011) and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT$_{0.85}$) criterion (refer Table II). The values were lower than the 0.85 threshold (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

Assessment of the structural model
For both the groups, the model's explanatory power was examined by evaluating the R^2 values of the two endogenous variables: brand resilience and +WOM. The R^2 values for real-buyers were 0.661 for brand resilience and 0.516 for +WOM, and for fake-buyers were 0.428 for brand resilience and 0.732 for +WOM. These values were above the threshold of 0.2 for behavioral research (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

The SRMR values of the models were 0.06 and 0.048 for real-buyers and fake-buyers, respectively, which were below the threshold of 0.08 (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The assessment of the structural model was done using 5,000 bootstrap resamples and 5,000 permutations. These results are presented in Table IV and Figure 1.

MIP

Constructs	Original buyers					Fake-buyers				
	Brand love	Brand resilience	Inner-self	Social-self	WOM	Brand love	Brand resilience	Inner-self	Social-self	WOM
Brand love	*0.78*					*0.80*				
Brand resilience	0.59 (0.66)	*0.90*				−0.19 (0.20)	*0.87*			
Inner-self	0.72 (0.81)	0.60 (0.69)	*0.83*			0.12 (0.13)	0.07 (0.08)	*0.79*		
Social-self	0.20 (0.22)	0.12 (0.13)	0.15 (0.17)	*0.82*		0.74 (0.83)	−0.36 (0.42)	0.05 (0.08)	*0.82*	
WOM	0.23 (0.25)	0.16 (0.18)	0.20 (0.24)	0.20 (0.22)	*0.83*	0.73 (0.81)	−0.26 (0.29)	0.10 (0.12)	0.73 (0.85)	*0.85*

Notes: The diagonal elements (in italic) are the square roots of the variance between the constructs and their measures (AVE). Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios of correlations are in the parentheses

Table II.
Fornell-Larcker
criterion analysis
and HTMT ratios

Notes: The *,**,***Indicate *p*-values less than 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 respectively

The results suggest that inner and social self-expressiveness had a significant positive impact on brand love for real and fake-buyers. Additionally, inner self-expressiveness did not have a significant positive impact on +WOM for both the groups. On the other hand, social self-expressiveness had a significant positive impact on +WOM for both the groups. Inner self-expressiveness had a significant positive impact on brand resilience for real-buyers. This impact was not significant for fake-buyers. Social self-expressiveness had a significant negative effect on brand resilience for fake-buyers. This impact was not significant for real-buyers. Furthermore, brand love had a significant positive effect on +WOM and brand resilience for both the groups.

The study does not propose mediation hypotheses, but the estimation of the structural model includes the significance tests of the indirect effects (Henseler *et al.*, 2009a). Bootstrap procedure was used to generate 5,000 resamples to determine the bias-corrected confidence intervals of the indirect effects (Cheung and Lau, 2008). These results are presented in Table V.

Brand love mediated the relationship between inner self-expressiveness and +WOM for real-buyers but not fake-buyers. Additionally, brand love also mediated the relationship between inner self-expressiveness and brand resilience for real-buyers but not fake-buyers. Furthermore, brand love mediated the relationship between social self-expressiveness and +WOM for fake-buyers but not real-buyers. At last, brand love mediated the relationship between social self-expressiveness and brand resilience for both the groups.

MGA
Measurement invariance was tested before performing MGA (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The measurement invariance of composites (MICOM) technique was adopted, which is highly suitable for models using PLS-SEM (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The three-step approach for MICOM enabled the extraction of the partial measurement invariance for the two groups, which is a prerequisite for interpretation and comparison of the differences between the groups while performing MGA (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Table III presents the MICOM results.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path coefficient-realbuyers	Path coefficient-fake buyers	CIs (bias corrected)- real-buyers	CIs (bias corrected)- fake-buyers	Path coefficient difference	p-value Henseler's MGA	Permutation p-values	Supported
H1	Inner-self → Brand love	0.71***	0.08*	(0.61, 0.78)	(−0.03, 0.17)	0.62	1.00***	0.00***	Yes
H2	Social-self → Brand love	0.10**	0.73***	(0.01, 0.19)	(0.63, 0.81)	0.63	1.00***	0.00***	Yes
H3	Inner-self → WOM	0.07	0.04	(−0.08, 0.22)	(−0.06, 0.11)	0.03	0.37	0.62	No
H4	Social-self → WOM	0.15**	0.42***	(0.02, 0.25)	(0.28, 0.57)	0.26	0.99***	0.00***	Yes
H5	Inner-self → Brand resilience	0.35***	0.07	(0.23, 0.46)	(−0.07, 0.18)	0.27	0.00***	0.00***	Yes
H6	Social-self → Brand resilience	−0.00	−0.48***	(−0.09, 0.08)	(−0.63, −0.32)	0.47	1.00***	0.00***	Yes
H7	Brand love → WOM	0.14*	0.42***	(−0.02, 0.29)	(0.25, 0.56)	0.28	0.99***	0.00***	Yes
H8	Brand love → Brand resilience	0.34***	0.15**	(0.20, 0.46)	(−0.01, 0.34)	0.19	0.05**	0.06*	Yes

Notes: The numbers in parentheses are the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval. In Henseler's MGA method, the p-value lower than 0.05 or higher than 0.95 indicates at the 5 percent level significant differences between specific path coefficients across two groups. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

Table III.
Results of
hypothesis testing

Henseler's MGA (Henseler *et al.*, 2009b) and the permutation test (Chin and Dibbern, 2010) was used for MGA. For PLS-SEM, these are the most conservative techniques in examining the differences between the two groups' path coefficients (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2011). Both the tests return a *p*-value of differences between the specific path coefficients across the two groups. For the Henseler's MGA test, a 5 percent level of significant difference between path coefficients is indicated by a *p*-value of lower than 0.05 or higher than 0.95. On the other hand, for the permutation test, it is represented only by a *p*-value of lower than 0.05. The permutation test identified significant differences between the R^2 values of brand resilience and +WOM between real and fake-buyers. The results support *H1* through *H2* and *H4* through *H8*. However, *H3* was not supported. Table IV and Figure 1 present these results.

In addition to the differences between direct effects, the study tested the difference between indirect effects using Henseler's MGA (Henseler *et al.*, 2009b) and the permutation test (Chin and Dibbern, 2010). These results are presented in Table V. Results suggest that mediating effect of brand love between inner self-expressiveness and +WOM is not significantly different between the two groups. However, the mediating effect of brand love between inner self-expressiveness and brand resilience is significantly stronger for real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers. The mediating effect of brand love between social self-expressiveness and +WOM is significantly stronger for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers. However, the mediating effect of brand love between inner self-expressiveness and brand resilience is not significantly different between the two groups.

Discussion
The findings suggest that both types of buyers experience a love-like emotion toward the brand. However, there are differences in their antecedents and outcomes. First, the relationship between social-self and brand love is significantly stronger for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers. This suggests that a brand's ability to enhance one's social status significantly influences brand love for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers. The relationship between inner-self and brand love, on the other hand, is significantly stronger for real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers. This suggests that the brand's ability to enhance one's inner-self significantly influences real-love as compared to fake-love.

Second, the relationship between inner self-expressiveness and +WOM is not significantly stronger for real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers. This relationship is also not significant for both the groups. Evidently, consumers who long for a higher social status are more likely to indulge in talking about their luxury brands (Yang and Mattila, 2017). Since inner self-expressiveness of a brand enhances only the inner-self, it does not significantly influence +WOM. On the other hand, fake-buyers purchase counterfeits largely for their ability to enhance their social-self by letting others know about their brands. Therefore, the relationship between social self-expressiveness and +WOM is significantly stronger in the case of fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers.

Third, the relationship between inner self-expressiveness and brand resilience is significantly stronger for real-buyers as compared to fake-buyers. Since real-buyers' self-identity is strongly associated with their brand, they may not break their brand relationship due to negative information. As compared to real-brands, counterfeits do not largely enhance the buyers' inner-self, therefore, their resilience may not endure as firmly as real-buyers'. Fake-buyers' social status may be jeopardized if their brands indulge in wrongdoings. They may break their association with a brand that indulges in wrongdoings to maintain their social status. Therefore, the relationship between social self-expressiveness and brand resilience is significantly stronger (inversely) for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers.

Construct	Configural invariance	Compositional invariance		Partial measurement invariance	Equal mean value		Equal variance value		Full measurement invariance
		C=1	Confidence interval		Difference	Confidence interval	Difference	Confidence interval	
Brand love	Yes	1.00	(0.99; 10.00)	Yes	0.32	(−0.17; 0.18)	−0.04	(−0.15, 0.15)	No
Brand resilience	Yes	0.99	(0.99; 1.00)	Yes	0.82	(−0.18; 0.18)	−0.35	(−0.18, 0.17)	No
Inner-self	Yes	1.00	(0.99; 1.00)	Yes	0.78	(−0.18; 0.18)	1.38	(−0.19, 0.19)	No
Social-self	Yes	0.99	(0.99; 1.00)	Yes	−0.59	(−0.18; 0.17)	−0.54	(−0.20, 0.19)	No
WOM	Yes	0.99	(0.99; 1.00)	Yes	−0.15	(−0.18; 0.17)	−0.58	(−0.23, 0.21)	No

Note: The numbers in parentheses are the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval

Table IV.
Results of invariance measurement testing using permutation

Brand love for
counterfeits

Relationship	Path coefficient-real buyers	Path coefficient-fake buyers	CIs (bias corrected)-real-buyers	CIs (bias corrected)-fake-buyers	Path coefficients difference	p-value Henseler's MGA	Permutation p-values	Supported
Inner-self → Brand love → Brand resilience	0.24***	0.013	(0.15, 0.34)	(−0.01, 0.04)	0.23	1.00***	0.00***	Yes
Inner-self → Brand love → WOM	0.10*	0.03	(−0.01, 0.21)	(−0.01, 0.09)	0.07	0.12	0.29	No
Social-self → Brand love → Brand resilience	0.03*	0.11**	(0.01, 0.07)	(−0.01, 0.26)	0.08	0.87	0.10	No
Social-self → Brand love → WOM	0.014	0.37***	(−0.01, 0.04)	(0.18, 0.42)	0.29	1.00***	0.00***	Yes

Notes: The numbers in parentheses are the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval. In Henseler's MGA method, the p-value lower than 0.05 or higher than 0.95 indicates at the 5 percent level significant differences between specific path coefficients across two groups. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.00$

Table V.
Results of
mediation test

Fourth, the relationship between brand love and +WOM is significantly stronger for fake-buyers as compared to real-buyers. Fake-love originates from the consumers' desire for a higher social status. Real-buyers purchase originals as it enables them to enhance their social as well as inner-self. Their love is not limited to making others aware of their brand possessions. Therefore, their tendency to offer +WOM is lower than that of fake-buyers.

Fifth, real-buyers have a significantly stronger relationship between brand love and brand resilience as compared to fake-buyers. Internally, fake-buyers are aware that they are using counterfeits; their love does not originate from the brand's performance. It stems from the brand's ability to boost their social standing. Therefore, negative brand information will easily perturb fake-buyers, as their self-image is contingent on the brand's performance. On the other hand, real-love also stems from the belief that there is a congruency between themselves and the brand meaning. Their association is much stronger; therefore, shortcomings by a brand will not lead to a complete abandonment of the brand.

Additionally, as per the mediation analysis, the effect of a brand's ability to enhance buyers' inner-self on brand resilience will be significantly stronger for real-love as compared to fake-love. On the other hand, the effect of a brand's ability to enhance buyers' social-self on +WOM will be significantly stronger for fake-love as compared to real-love.

Theoretical implications
The impact of consumer-brand relationship on counterfeiting is largely unexplored. This study addresses this gap by demonstrating that fake-buyers also develop a love-like feeling toward the corresponding real-brands. Therefore, fake-love could be a motivator for counterfeits' demand.

Previous research on brand love has explored its antecedents and outcomes (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Roy *et al.*, 2016). This is the first study that explores the concept of brand love among consumers who purchase counterfeits in spite of being able to afford the real-brands. Furthermore, it explores how real-love and fake-love differ in their antecedents and outcomes. Wallace *et al.* (2014) showed that consumers love a brand for its self-expressiveness capabilities. Furthermore, they suggested that self-expressiveness could influence brand love differently depending on its two components. The primary theoretical contribution of this study is to demonstrate that these two components impact brand love differently based on the type of buyer. Inner self-expressiveness influences real-love more than fake-love, whereas, social self-expressiveness influences fake-love more than real-love.

Furthermore, this study shows that both love types influence +WOM but fake-love's impact is higher than that of real-love. Since fake-love originates largely due to social self-expressiveness, the ability of a brand to project a higher social status is largely responsible for +WOM. On the other hand, along with social self-expressiveness, inner self-expressiveness is also responsible for real-love, which does not abandon the brand due to its wrongdoings. In the presence of negative brand-related information, brands that resonate with the consumers' social-self are highly vulnerable to adverse reaction as compared to brands that are high on inner self-expressiveness.

Managerial implications
Luxury brands have neglected fake-buyers by assuming that they lack financial means or appreciation of real-brands, and hence are not their potential customers (Stöttinger and Penz, 2015). However, their price might not always be the reason for buying counterfeits. There could be differences regarding the motivations and relationship patterns that consumers develop with brands that can turn potential real-buyers into fake-buyers.

The results suggest that real-buyers and fake-buyers love the real-brand. However, the antecedents to that love are different in both the cases. Fake-love largely originates from the

consumers' desire to enhance their social-self. On the other hand, real-love originates from the brand's ability to enhance the consumer's inner as well as social-self. As per the self-expansion model (Aron and Aron, 1986), consumers form brand relationships with the desire to grow and progress by incorporating brand characteristics into their sense of self. Therefore, luxury brands can highlight the importance of its authenticity as compared to its ability to enhance the social-self. This can persuade consumers in believing that they may not be able to grow and progress by owning a counterfeit, which can curb its demand.

In today's rapidly changing technology, brand managers may find it difficult to differentiate real-brands from counterfeits on the basis of product attributes alone (Veloutsou and Guzman, 2017). Therefore, they can focus on developing a brand community where the real-buyers can participate in exclusive events. Such events will help in creating brand-related stories and experiences that can be used for promotions. This will highlight the importance of owning a real-brand and creating an envy among others, enhancing consumers' social-self. Through such activities, consumers will be able to understand the importance of associating themselves with real-brands due to the enhancement of their social as well as inner-self.

Brands that enhance consumers' inner-self also enjoy a higher brand resilience. Such brands may not experience total abandonment or a WOM in the presence of negative information. Whereas brands that are high only on social self-expressiveness risk abandonment or WOM in the presence of negative brand-related information. Therefore, managers can avoid communication strategies that solely focus on the enhancement of consumers' social-self.

Limitations and future research

This study categorizes fake-buyers as individuals who can afford real-brands yet prefer to purchase its counterfeits. Our primary aim was to study the love fake-buyers feel for the brands whose counterfeits they possess. In addition, there are consumers who purchase counterfeits, as they cannot afford the original product. This study does not explore this segment.

This study shows that self-expressiveness of a brand is an antecedent to real-love and fake-love. Previous research has shown that brand personality also leads to brand love (Roy *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, consumers love brands that are congruent with their personality (Castaño and Perez, 2014). Therefore, future research must explore which dimensions of brand personality have a greater influence on fake-love as compared to real-love, and which personality dimensions of a brand coincide with the fake-buyers.

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