



PERILS OF ECOMMERCE TRANSACTION FOR CUSTOMERS

A review of the availability of counterfeit goods on marketplace platforms

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the research work done on eCommerce counterfeit frauds pertaining to three areas. The study explores the concept of "**Perils of eCommerce transactions**" as "**Customer Victimization, Brand Reputation Loss.**"

Consumer safety in eCommerce transactions is of the highest importance. This is because it may have a negative impact on fair competition and the free flow of accurate information in the marketplace. **Customers as a counterfeit victim** in the era of eCommerce is a growing reality.

Propositions were deduced from the assessment of literature and hypotheses in the 24 papers included in the research for this critical evaluation. The author of this article wrote the propositions in a way that allows for flexibility in generating hypotheses.

We found five propositions that might be utilized as a foundation for future study and eventually developing a theory or model. Information connected to eCommerce counterfeit scams was collected, collated, and presented to provide readers with a more thorough and up-to-date picture of the problem. Research gaps and omissions were identified, generating new research questions.

Customer victimization is a reality. It is high time that the brand and eCommerce platforms realize the potential loss to them.

Keywords

Counterfeiting, Victimization, Brand & Marketplace Reputation

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 3 billion people utilize the internet worldwide now.¹ Out of this, India has a total of 259.14 million internet and broadband customers.² According to research published by Forrester Research, social networks play a crucial role in attracting customers online and encouraging them to connect with companies. Consumers' purchasing patterns have shifted dramatically as more and more individuals are choosing to purchase from the comfort of their homes. With higher sales online the risk of product counterfeiting has increased multifold.

¹ Cited from "Internet Usage Statistics - The Internet Big Picture - World Internet Users and Population Stats" available at <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

² Cited from "The Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators (April – June 2014)" available at <http://www.trai.gov.in/WriteReadData/PIRReport/Documents/Indicator%20Reports%20-%20Jun-14.pdf>

Product counterfeiting is a particular kind of intellectual property (IP) theft and trademark infringement (World Intellectual Property Organization). Counterfeiting, an illegal practice that violates the intellectual property rights of tangible items, affects practically all businesses and products (Heinonen and Wilson, 2012; Wilson and Fenoff, 2014).

Counterfeiting is nothing new in India. There is an annual loss of 1 trillion rupees for the Indian economy. One in three Indian people have been victims of phony items from one or the other eCommerce websites, making online counterfeiting the fastest rising crime. All major industries and sectors are affected to some degree by counterfeiting, which occurs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Consumer confidence is being undermined as firms are targeted more often and more massively than ever before.

OCED-1999 guidelines highlighted, among others, *“three fundamental characteristics of consumer protection in eCommerce. Customers must have access to electronic commerce. Secondly, the implementation of clear and efficient consumer protection measures to identify fraudulent, dishonest, and unfair online conduct is crucial for establishing client confidence in eCommerce. Thirdly, all parties involved, including the government, businesses, consumers, and their representatives, must give special attention to establishing adequate redress processes.”*

Internet sales of counterfeit goods are preferred by criminals for several reasons. They may conceal themselves behind the Internet's anonymity; if they utilize the dark web, even their IP addresses can be concealed. They may sell to customers all over the world thanks to the Internet, which allows businesses to circumvent national borders and reach customers all over the world. For brand owners, it's impossible to tell if a website is selling counterfeits without making expensive purchases from the site since counterfeiters might show legitimate items on their website while shipping counterfeit goods to the customer. Counterfeiting is often aided by criminal networks, resulting in hundreds of sites selling the same items over several servers, making it difficult for the brand owner to put an end to these counterfeiters. Brand owners must collaborate with law enforcement to shut down counterfeiting networks.

For trademark owners and other Internet stakeholders, the availability of *“counterfeits via online marketplaces, search engines, independent websites, and increasingly social networking sites”* is a major worry. Prior research in offline and online deception (Boyle 2003; Klein et al. 1997) has investigated the elements that contribute to the detection of another party's purposeful efforts to mislead. However, they have not studied the very topic of why people may genuinely be duped by intentionally dishonest activities.

E-commerce has presented brand owners with a new sales channel and the opportunity to access uncharted customer segments of the Indian market.

India's e-commerce sector is predicted to expand from \$46.2 billion in 2020 to a total of US\$350 billion; that is predicted to be generated by the year 2030. E-commerce sales in India are predicted to reach \$111 billion in 2024 and \$200 billion in 2026, according to industry estimates. ("E-commerce in India: Industry Overview, Market Size & Growth| IBEF", 2022).

In today's world of global eCommerce, consumer safety & protection is a hot topic. This is because, it may have a negative impact on fair competition and the free flow of accurate information in the marketplace, as well as it may lead to fraud and deceit in consumers' eCommerce transactions.

This study looks at the other side of eCommerce frauds in relation to counterfeit products. Part # 1 described the concept of "Other Side of eCommerce transactions" as "Customer Victimization, Brand Reputation Loss, and Marketplace Platform Reputation Loss." The following findings were critically synthesized from 24 articles: (a) articles about counterfeit e-commerce scams were discovered in journals from a variety of disciplines; (b) an increase in the use of theories was observed, with theories being used as a framework for the research, to justify studying specific variables, or as rationales for hypotheses.

In Part # 2 of this critical appraisal, the main objective of the study is completely achieved by the examination of factors, research propositions, and discussions connected to counterfeit e-commerce frauds. The aims of Part 2 were to evaluate studies regarding counterfeit e-commerce scams for (a) particular variables researched and important results within broad categories of variables, (b) propositions from which hypotheses might be drawn.

Literature Review

Author has reviewed 24 articles that are listed below. Variables were analysed and three major conceptual categories emerged: "customer victimization, brand reputation loss, and marketplace platform reputation loss". Examining particular factors within each of the three main conceptual categories might add to the practical and theoretical benefit of knowing the "other side of the eCommerce transactions".

Table 1: Articles clustered

Article #	Paper citation
1	Fischer P, Lea SE, Evans KM (2013) Why do individuals respond to fraudulent scam communications and lose money? The psychological determinants of scam compliance. <i>J Appl Soc Psychol</i> 43(10): 2060–2072
2	Heinonen, J. A., Holt, T. J., & Wilson, J. M. (2012). Product counterfeits in the online environment: An empirical assessment of victimization and reporting characteristics. <i>International Criminal Justice Review</i> , 22(4), 353-371.
3	Fonseca, C., Moreira, S., & Guedes, I. (2022). Online Consumer Fraud Victimization and Reporting: A Quantitative Study of the Predictors and Motives. <i>Victims & Offenders</i> , 17(5), 756-780.

4	Large, J. (2019). The Counterfeit Fashion Industry and Consumer Understandings of Harm. In <i>The Consumption of Counterfeit Fashion</i> (pp. 69-92). Palgrave Pivot, Cham.
5	Adams Jr, G. T. (2016). <i>Empowering consumers as capable guardians to prevent online product counterfeiting victimization in the athletic footwear industry: a routine activity perspective</i> . Michigan State University.
6	Ok, E., Qian, Y., Strejcek, B., & Aquino, K. (2021). Signaling virtuous victimhood as indicators of Dark Triad personalities. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 120(6), 1634–1661. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000329
7	Souiden, N., Ladhari, R., & Zarrouk Amri, A. (2018). Is buying counterfeit sinful? Investigation of consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions of counterfeit products in a Muslim country. <i>International Journal of Consumer Studies</i> , 42(6), 687-703.
8	Solomon, O. J. O., & Adeyemi Oluwakemi, O. J. O. (2012). Prevalence of Counterfeiting in Nigeria: Evaluating Consumers' Experience in South-Eastern and South Western Nigeria. <i>International Research Journal: Global Journals Inc.(USA) Online ISSN</i> .
9	Hieke, S. (2010). Effects of counterfeits on the image of luxury brands: An empirical study from the customer perspective. <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> , 18(2), 159-173.
10	Gabrielli, V., Grappi, S., & Baghi, I. (2012). Does counterfeiting affect luxury customer-based brand equity?. <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> , 19(7), 567-580.
11	Otim, S., & Grover, V. (2010). E-commerce: a brand name's curse. <i>Electronic Markets</i> , 20(2), 147-160.
12	<i>James W. Gentry, Sanjay Putrevu, Clifford Shultz II, and Suraj Commuri (2001) , "How Now Ralph Lauren? the Separation of Brand and Product in a Counterfeit Culture"</i> , in <i>NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 28</i> , eds. Mary C. Gilly and Joan Meyers-Levy, Valdosta, GA : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 258-265.
13	Chen, K. (2016). Counterfeit as a Challenge to Chinese E-Commerce Platform—the case of Alibaba.

14	Zuccaro, E. A. (2016). Gucci v. Alibaba: a balanced approach to secondary liability for e-commerce platforms. <i>North Carolina Journal of Law & Technology</i> , 17(5), On-144.
15	Alvarez, E. (2018). Amazon needs to get a handle on its counterfeit problem. <i>Engadget.com</i> . Retrieved from https://www.engadget.com/2018/05/31/fulfilled-by-amazon-counterfeit-fake/
16	Yoo, B., & Lee, S. H. (2005). Do counterfeits promote genuine products?. <i>Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY</i> .
17	Cao, Z., Dewan, S., & Lin, J. Identification and Impact of Online Deceptive Counterfeit Products: Evidence from Amazon.
18	Butticè, V., Caviggioli, F., Franzoni, C., Scellato, G., & Thumm, N. (2018). <i>Impact of counterfeiting on the performance of digital technology companies</i> (No. 2018-03). JRC Digital Economy Working Paper.
19	Chow, D. C. (2019). Alibaba, Amazon, and Counterfeiting in the Age of the Internet. <i>Nw. J. Int'l L. & Bus.</i> , 40, 157.
20	Mavlanova, T., & Benbunan-Fich, R. (2010). Counterfeit products on the internet: The role of seller-level and product-level information. <i>International Journal of Electronic Commerce</i> , 15(2), 79-104.
21	Majithia, V. (2019). The changing landscape of intermediary liability for E-commerce platforms: Emergence of a new regime. <i>Indian JL & Tech.</i> , 15, 470.
22	International Trademark Association. (2009). Addressing the Sale of Counterfeits on the Internet. <i>New York: International Trademark Association</i> .
23	Kammel, K., Kennedy, J., Cermak, D., & Manoukian, M. (2021). Responsibility for the Sale of Trademark Counterfeits Online: Striking a Balance in Secondary Liability While Protecting Consumers. <i>AIPLA QUARTERLY JOURNAL</i> , 49(2), 201.
24	Paasi, A. (2018). Borderless worlds and beyond: Challenging the state-centric cartographies. In <i>Borderless Worlds for Whom?</i> (pp. 21-36). Routledge.

Methodology

A thorough search for relevant publications was the first step. The articles that were included met the following requirements: (a) an empirical study that used systematic data collection and analysis; (b) a full-length article published in a refereed journal; (c) a topic related to counterfeit eCommerce frauds; (d) publication dates between 2000 and 2022 (a 22-year period); and (e) variables related to counterfeit eCommerce frauds in constructs like "Customer Victimization, Brand Reputation Loss, and Marketplace Platform Reputation.

Studies and Inclusion Criterion

First, relevant articles were found using "One Search (a database search technology that accesses significant electronic databases)". "EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete, First Search, JSTOR, Lexis Nexis, Opposing Viewpoints Resource Centre, Ovid, ProQuest, Web of Science, and Google Scholar" were among the databases visited by One Search. Customer victimisation, brand reputation loss, and market place platform reputation loss were the search phrases. In addition, the titles, abstracts, keywords, and bodies of all identified publications were also reviewed before coming to an agreement on whether or not each one met the established standards outlined above.

We limited our search criteria to peer-reviewed journal publications, conference presentations, and book chapters in English in order to reduce more general comments and published statistics pieces. Both quantitative and qualitative investigations were permissible; however, the latter should use a recognised analytical method, such as "interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)", rather than more anecdotal reflections of instances, scams, etc.

Research Propositions

Propositions were deduced from the assessment of literature and hypotheses in the 24 papers included in the research for this critical evaluation. The author of this article wrote the propositions in a way that allows for flexibility in generating hypotheses.

We found four propositions that might be utilized as a foundation for future study and eventually developing a theory or model.

Analysis and Findings

Customer Victimization

The work done by Heinonen Justin, Holt Thomas and Wilson Jeremy (2012) is quite significant in the area of customer victimisation. This is a pioneering work that acknowledges customers are victims of online product counterfeiting.

They have analysed the data for the two years. The thousands of victims from the two years of complaint data they have analysed suggest on-line consumers are concerned about product counterfeiting and seek resolution after victimisation.

Their work "*Product Counterfeits in the Online Environment: An Empirical Assessment of Victimization and Reporting Characteristics*," offers a great insight on how customers have reported such incidents and whom they have reported the incidents to. They have also examined the characteristics and cost of such incidents.

The median monetary loss per victim was greater for auction websites than non-auction websites. Both auction and non-auction website victims most often contacted the individual or business allegedly providing the counterfeit goods first. Most victims did not report the incident to law-enforcement or consumer-protection agencies in the first instance.

Looking at the volume of counterfeit products being offered on the eCommerce platforms—the technological inability of the platforms and the paucity of resources to regulate the sellers, along with the difficulties that the brand owners continue to experience in monitoring them—has created an environment where consumers of authentic goods are not adequately protected from fraud. (Joseph M. Forgione, 2017)

According to Modic and Lea (2013: p. 15), Internet fraud involves three phases: "plausibility," "interaction," and "loss utility." Once an offer is seen to be plausible, the subsequent stages are more likely to occur. The research in this field has been broken down into many main categories, according to the study.

Table 2: Findings of variables related to customer victimization

Article #	variables
1	<p>Four key factors are highlighted by Fischer et al. (2013) that increase the likelihood of people responding in an online fraudulent manner:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) high motivation triggers in terms of the size of the reward; (2) trust, often generated by using 'official' notices, logos etc.; (3) social influence to gain compliance; and (4) the scarcity or urgency of the opportunity.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accelerating online trade has boosted the market for counterfeit goods. One possible explanation is that there are more potential for fraud because customers have less means of verifying the authenticity of products they buy online.

3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Money lost was the single most accurate predictor of reporting online fraud.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While discussions concerning counterfeit products often centre on harm (or lack thereof), it is evident that ideas of direct and deserving victimisation play a significant role in influencing responses to the discussion. Despite the purported emphasis on harm, these discussions rarely extend their analysis of harm beyond the realms of individual customers, commercial enterprises, and illegal action.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The prevalence of online sales of fake athletic footwear to uninformed consumers may be reduced by encouraging consumers to take pride in their role as stakeholders in this fight and extend online guardianship by seeking and sharing knowledge in IVBC's (Adjei, Noble, and Noble, 2010). It would be useful to expand the scope of this research by identifying IVBCs for other shoe brands and marketplaces, analysing their current amount of information sharing, and evaluating the indicators that may be gleaned from conversations concerning counterfeit items. - Because counterfeiters have practically mastered their capacity to reproduce the real goods and may set a price equal to that of the legitimate product, it may be extraordinarily difficult for buyers to discriminate between the two, as noted by Wilcox. - This shows how genuine product purchasers may be tricked into legitimizing the need for counterfeits. - The results of this research might be used to guide efforts to educate this group about the dangers of buying counterfeits and how to verify product offers they encounter online, with the ultimate objective of reducing demand for fake items.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study tests the idea that the number of times a person sends out a "virtuous victim signal" is a good predictor of their willingness to engage in and support unethical behaviour, such as wanting to buy counterfeit products and making moral judgments about fakes.

7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study shows that religion, ethics, and attitudes all have an effect on whether or not someone wants to buy fakes. The analysis shows that perceived economic benefits have a stronger effect on people's plans to buy fakes.
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good feelings about products that aren't real. - Anyone could buy a fake because they are very cheap and easy to find.

Note: "Numbers in table refer to number of articles in Table 1"

More than half of the publications in this subcategory focused on how scammers structured their fraudulent messages in order to draw in victims (Table 2). Within talks about criminality, harm, and victimization more generally, the articles also discussed the motivations behind customers' purchases of counterfeit goods. The effects of the counterfeit industry are discussed. While discussions concerning counterfeit products often center on harm (or lack thereof), it is evident that ideas of direct and deserving victimization play a significant role in influencing responses to the discussion. (Large, 2019)

LocalCircles conducted a seven-poll survey to see how massive the counterfeit problem on e-commerce sites is. 30,000 unique consumers around India participated in the survey while casting over 57,000 votes. The answers are unbelievable. The results of these [surveys](#) have been utilized in the institution of the guidelines to reduce counterfeiting frauds.

- 19% of consumers received a fake product in the past 6 months of their purchase
- Fragrances and cosmetics section received the highest votes (35%) for the most counterfeited category in the last 6 months
- Unfortunately, only 16% of consumers are able to identify a counterfeit product and rest of the customers were deceived

Review Meta is a site that evaluates the quality of the reviews on Amazon.com. Tommy Noonan, founder of reviewmeta, said that they have analysed all the reviews that were posted to Amazon.com from January 2015 till October 2019. He emphasised that it is very difficult for anyone to accurately determine which products are counterfeit and which are not. They have found that products with reviews containing keywords counterfeit or fake have increased from 1.725% of reviews in 2015 to 4.275% in 2019. This is almost a 3 fold jump and this analysis doesn't take into account the contextual use of words such as "I love this fake houseplant !! "

Some of the key propositions that authors have suggested are

P1a: Religiosity, ethics, and attitudes, all influence the intent to buy counterfeits.

P2a: Counterfeiters have practically mastered their capacity to reproduce the real goods and may set a price equal to that of the legitimate product, *it may be extraordinarily difficult for buyers to discriminate between the two.* (Wilcox and Boys, 2014, p. 280-281)

P3a: In terms of eCommerce scams, victims differ in terms of their traits and profiles.

P4a: Customers are unaware rather than unethical

Some of the victims may not have participated because they believed their psychological and emotional toll was larger or more severe. Another scenario is that these victims weren't at all impacted and had no interest in taking part. However, it becomes apparent that victims have a wide range of traits and profiles. This supports earlier studies on fraud victimization (Button, Lewis, & Tapley, 2009a; Button et al., 2009b; Cross et al., 2016). Although it was discovered that the participants freely discussed these and other topics, it's possible that some of these impacts were kept a secret from the researchers out of embarrassment.

Consumers' purchasing habits are being drastically altered by the availability of fake products online. According to independent research commissioned by Incopro, *more than three-quarters of UK consumers (76%) would be less likely to buy products from a brand if their reputation was associated with counterfeit goods* (Incopro, 2022). Companies like Alibaba have dedicated teams to root out and prohibit the sale of counterfeit goods because of the serious threat they pose to consumers' trust in legitimate brands. Insight from the surveyed consumers reveals that the damage to consumer loyalty caused by fake goods can be long-lasting. (Maaz, 2020)

Another problem is the increasing sophistication of counterfeiting gangs. As the quality of manufacturing procedures, materials utilized, and packaging all rises, it becomes more difficult to tell a fake from the real thing.

As online sales continue to establish their usefulness, businesses will continue to prioritize improving their e-commerce platforms in the near future. However, there is no hint that counterfeit manufacture will slow down, so brands & e-tailers need to consider the long-term effects of increased access to knockoffs. The proliferation and improvement of fake products makes it all the more evident that e-tailers and brands must prioritize. This can be an interesting subject to probe further and future researchers can explore this subject.

Case of Alibaba

As the counterfeit goods industry in China is burgeoning³ There is every cause to be concerned about the future of online retail and eCommerce. This study focuses on Alibaba as a case in order to get a thorough familiarity with and appreciation for the difficulty that counterfeiting presents for online marketplaces. Taobao⁴, one of Alibaba's e-commerce sites, is one of the largest and most representative in China, but it has a perpetually terrible

³ <https://daxueconsulting.com/counterfeit-products-in-china/>

⁴ <https://www.taobao.com/>

reputation as a distribution conduit for knockoffs (Schuman, 2015). **This section examines Alibaba's acknowledgement of the problem and efforts to combat counterfeiting on its eCommerce platforms, with the ultimate aim of improving the customer experience for both customers and sellers while also advancing the company's long-term objectives.**

First, Alibaba attempts to address the counterfeiting issues on Taobao. "Zero tolerance" is more than simply a phrase; it is backed by concrete measures. In order to improve the online shopping environment, Alibaba has employed professionals to handle counterfeit issues. Alibaba collaborates not just with social volunteers but also with brand owners, international organizations, and Chinese government organizations (Bonato, 2021). Few initiatives, including "integrity program", "mantianxing program", "self-brand cultivation program⁵", and others, are implemented to prevent the negative reputation produced by counterfeits during the last several years. Clearly, Alibaba is concerned not just with the earnings of brand owners, producers, and consumers, but also with the destiny of the hundreds of thousands of small and medium-sized organizations that do business on Taobao (Wu and Gereffi, 2018). This strategy will enable Alibaba to progressively eradicate its poor image, recover its position within its vendor and customer bases.

Discussions

With the expansion of eCommerce, new models of distribution have evolved. It has expanded customer choice, leaving them vulnerable to new kinds of unethical business practices.

According to Zaichkowsky (2006), if a brand is very visible, attractive and valuable, stealing might be a cheap and efficient method. Counterfeiting will persist as long as physical features of identification are simple to copy and difficult to prevent. According to Bastos and Levy (2012), brand recognition is more important than product performance, and they recognize that this fact draws counterfeiters as well as consumers. Therefore, it's easy to make an identical copy of a genuine product using brand identifiers (such as the company's logo and colors) that are inextricably linked to the brand's physical identity. In this process, new technology facilitates and assists.

At all costs, brands must defend their intellectual property rights (IP) whenever possible, but currently, available enforcement measures fall far short of what is needed because they are ineffective when the damage has already been done and difficult to implement when the counterfeiter is unknown and difficult to reach. A strategy that relies solely on intellectual property is therefore doomed to failure in the long run.

Brand managers are left with little choices other than reactive enforcement efforts when a counterfeit is made accessible on the market. Online marketplace listings may be monitored and removed automatically. However, none of these options gives a mechanism to prevent or discourage counterfeiting before the product is even on the market.

⁵ <https://www.alibaba.com/showroom/create-your-own-brand.html>

Conclusion

The counterfeit sector is a direct result of industrial expansion and the importance put on brand image. It is a difficult issue to address. The industry of counterfeit products is detrimental to businesses since it badly affects their brand image. Brands may insulate themselves from counterfeits via direct-to-consumer strategies. Consumers of counterfeit goods run the danger of losing trust in the authenticity of their purchases.

Deterrence, prevention, and detection are all necessary components of a complete plan to reduce fraudulent eCommerce transactions (Grazioli and Jarvenpaa 2003b; Straub and Welke 1998). An effective method of preventing eCommerce fraud is consumer education, which can alert consumers to the possibility of online deception.

The actions taken by Alibaba have been the key focus of this investigation. Based on the findings of this research, it is clear that Alibaba has acknowledged and made efforts to address the issue of counterfeit goods by instituting various measures that take into account trust, reputation, and information asymmetry.

Limitations and Future Studies

It's still conceivable that any relevant journals and/or papers were missed despite a thorough and diligent search. It is imperative that future counterfeiting studies take a more holistic approach to the issue.

Further study can look into the cognitive and affective repercussions of detecting deception in eCommerce, such as the increased perceived risk of shopping at the website (e.g., Grazioli and Jarvenpaa 2000; Grazioli and Wang 2001), decreased trust toward the website, heightened feeling of violation (e.g., Robinson 1996), and more.

There is also a need for normative research, which suggests a set of trustworthy best practices, to help managers make informed decisions.

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