

# Impact of Perception of Counterfeits on Customers' Purchase Intention of Genuine Luxury Brands: The Mediating Effect of Brand Image and Brand Awareness

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**Abstract:** Counterfeits which are mostly known as the pirated brands or replicas can be seen to be an emerging phenomenon. The purpose for conducting this study is to look into the broader scenario regarding counterfeits as mostly the focus made in previous researches is on the negative perspective of counterfeits rather than to search out some neutral or positive impact. Further, rather than just the counterfeits itself, its mere perception has been taken into account.

Through various tools and techniques including normality distribution, exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, regression and mediation analysis an effort has been made to find out impact of perception of counterfeits on the intention of customers to purchase genuine ones with the mediating impact of brand awareness and brand image. A sample of 240 counterfeit users has been taken on convenient basis get a comprehensive understanding of the study.

The relation between perception of counterfeits and purchase intention of genuine luxury brands was found to be negative with the B value of -0.061 depicting that negative perception would encourage high intention of purchase towards the genuine products and vice-versa would be the case. The mediation effect of brand image and brand awareness was found to be significant with a percentage effect of 52.46% and 24.59% respectively which shows that both brand image and brand awareness altered the relation between perception of counterfeits and purchase intention of genuine luxury brands.

**Keywords:** Counterfeits; Brand Awareness; Brand Image; Genuine Luxury Brands; Purchase Intention

## I. INTRODUCTION

Counterfeits or in other words pirated products' manufacturing is one of the key challenges to genuine brands specifically luxury brands (Raza et al, 2014). In today's world, counterfeit goods of worth \$600 billion are being traded (Counterfeiting Intelligence Bureau, 2008) and which was estimated to be reached to about \$2 trillion till 2020 (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). In the era of emergence, only luxury goods like branded cloths and watches were at the aim of the threat of counterfeiting but in a small span of time this crime spread into food products, audio and video discs, watches, perfumes, handbags, pharmaceuticals, automobile

parts, electronic items etc. But the base behind the reality of counterfeit is the high value of the original brand, if the original brand possess no value, its counterfeit wouldn't exist (Eisend and Schuchert-Guler, 2006).

Major studies regarding counterfeits are more into the determinants of counterfeits (Stravinskiene et al., 2013), demand for counterfeits (Oneto et al., 2012), economic impact of counterfeits (Yang & Fryxell, 2009) and purchase intention towards counterfeits (Penz & Stottinger, 2005). Keeping all these research works in mind, the focus has been made on the missing point, the perception that people have in mind regarding counterfeits and its effects on the purchase intention of genuine luxury brands. Counterfeits which are mostly known as the pirated brands or in simple words copies of genuine brands have always been a problematic issue for the genuine brands as according to studies, its presence affect the market of genuine luxury brands in terms of decrease in sales volume (Peng et al, 2013). In Pakistan as well the demand and production of counterfeits has increased to a vast level (Shafique et al, 2015).

In this increasing trend towards counterfeits, the focus has to be made on the reason behind the purchase. Is it only the counterfeits or it's the perception about them that is affecting the market on genuine luxury brands? And if it is then what is the direction of that effect? i.e. positive or negative. It is mostly perceived that counterfeits have a negative impact on the brand image, competitive advantage and sales of a genuine luxury brand (Keller, 1993). But some researchers also contradict with this and believe that counterfeits don't damage the value, uniqueness and status of genuine brands (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000).

According to a study, the positive side of counterfeits could be taken as the hurdle created by the counterfeits for the new entrant in the luxury market that could act as a strong competitor for the genuine luxury brand as due to counterfeits the market becomes saturated for any other competition of genuine luxury brand to enter into the market Castro et al. (2008). The role of a mediator has also been taken into account as it changes the level of effect that the independent

variable has on the dependent variable (Chen & He, 2010). Similarly it would have to be seen that how the two mediators, brand awareness and brand image, change the impact of perception of counterfeits on the purchase intention of genuine luxury brands.

The following research objectives were set as a part of research work.

1. To find out the impact that perception of counterfeits of luxury brands have over the customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands.
2. To have an idea of how brand awareness affects the relation between perception of counterfeits of luxury brands and customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands?
3. To have an insight on how brand image affects the relation between perception of counterfeits of luxury brands and customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands?

Based on research work of various authors, data regarding variables and relationship between them was taken under consideration as a base for this research.

## II. COUNTERFEITING AND ITS PERCEPTION

Counterfeits can be termed as those products whose trademark is similar to the trademark of those that are already registered (Nia and Zaichkowsky, 2000). Talking about the counterfeit's impact, there has been a tremendous increase in the production as well as consumption of counterfeit goods for the past 20 years and that is about 10,000 percent of that what was started and the main reason of this increase is the stunning increase in consumer demand for pirated products (Yang & Fryxell, 2009). The purchaser of counterfeited products have a constructive perception about such products and the reasons they put forward include easy accessibility, low price and sometimes unawareness. On the contrary those who don't purchase counterfeits have a destructive perception about them and are of the view that counterfeits are harmful, cause of money wastage and less reliable. (Tsai & Chiou, 2012). While discussing attitude of consumers towards counterfeits Spink & Fejes (2012) were of the opinion that people having a self-conscious perspective mostly go for the counterfeits because every person cannot afford the genuine luxury brand so they take the help of counterfeits to get themselves the feeling of being a part of the high class society.

### 2.1 Intention to Purchase Genuine Luxury Brands:

The urge to symbolically represent oneself as a society figure followed by emotions leads to creation of a passion towards the purchase of luxury brands (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005). In this regard, ones personality and attitude does matters to some extent (Triandewi & Tjiptono, 2013). Other factors include brand consciousness, materialism, social comparison, fashion innovativeness, and fashion involvement (Zhang & Kim,

2013). Not only this but culture, self-expression attitude, self-presentation attitude, need for uniqueness (Bian & Forsythe, 2012), personal values, societal values and even gender differences (Nwankwo et al., 2014), can play an impacting role in this regard. Luxury brands not only include products like Car, AC, LCD but even in low involvement products there are some brands that make them luxurious e.g. watch itself is not luxury but wearing a Rado is luxurious, Ladies Hand Bag is not a luxury product but having a Gucci Hand Bag is a luxurious, Wearing glasses is not luxury but wearing Ray-Ban sun glasses is luxurious (Xiao & Nicholson, 2010).

### 2.2 Relationship between Perception of Counterfeits and Purchase Intention of Luxury Brands:

Yoo & Lee (2011) researched the effect of past experiences with counterfeits and genuine luxury brands on the purchase intention of each. They found out that the counterfeits have no relation with the purchase intention of luxury brands because the genuine luxury brands have a separate market which is not affected by what people perceive about the counterfeits. Either the perception is positive or negative it doesn't affect the purchase intention of people towards the genuine ones. Those who only want to purchase counterfeits will not show a negative or positive concern for the genuine luxury brands. As on one hand counterfeits are considered a threat to the original brand, on the other hand counterfeits, in many ways, can also be beneficial to the luxury brands.

In a study on counterfeits, Koklic (2011) took perfumes as the object of study and found that people were more willing to purchase those perfumes that have their pirated versions present in the market and the reason was the more awareness about genuine products through the counterfeits. Similarly Hilton et al. (2004) researched the fashion industry sorting out the relation between counterfeits and genuine brands. He put forth the point that the fashion brands which have their counterfeits available in the luxury market are more known to people as they are accessible to a massive class and more knowledge leads to high purchase intention. In a research, Penz & Stottinger (2005) found two types of behaviors shown by consumers of luxury brands when they come to know that the brand they are using has a cheaper copy in the market. A particular type of consumers may go for "Flight" in which the consumers deviate from the purchase of a particular luxury brand because they think that the uniqueness and the image of the luxury brand is no more left so they shift towards another brand. Other type of consumers go for "Reclamation" as they keep on using the particular luxury brand being copied because they are so much brand loyal that they don't bother whether their brand is expensive or cheap or it is being counterfeited or not.

The impact of Gray Marketing on the brand equity of luxury brands can be conceived in the sense that when it comes to unauthorized dealers of luxury products, it creates a problematic situation for the authorized ones selling genuine products as the consumers are getting the same brand of a bit

inferior quality at a comparatively much lesser price which breaks down the genuine market. Under this immense pressure, the genuine products can't maintain their brand worth and the brand equity comes to a losing edge leading to lower purchase intention of consumers towards genuine luxury brands (Eagle et al., 2001).

*H1: Perception of Counterfeits of luxury brands has a negative impact on the customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands.*

### 2.3 Mediating Role of Brand Image:

Consumers are more focused on the brand image rather than the quality because people are more fashion conscious like if Levis launches 6 pocket trousers in the market that attracts the attention of the consumers, then people who can't afford Levis will definitely go for its counterfeits because they just want the brand image and want to wear the latest fashion and are not much quality concerned. This indicates that people mostly purchase counterfeits of those products that are luxury brands thus products that are attached to a famous brand name are more copied as compared to products that are not luxury and don't belong to a famous brand (Eisend and Schuchert-Guler, 2006). In different notes brand image has been used as a mediating variable but not particularly in finding the relation between perception of counterfeits and purchase intention of genuine luxury brands. Yagci et al. (2009) took brand image as a mediating variable in order to find out the impact of comparative advertising format on consumer responses towards the product in terms of buying behavior.

Similarly Gill & Dawra (2010), used brand image as a mediating variable while evaluating Aaker's sources of brand equity. Sonmez et al. (2012) studied the relation between shelf spacing and customer's intention to purchase grocery products with the mediating effect of brand image and found that the impact of shelf spacing of grocery brands on customer's intention to purchase grocery items was altered depending upon the image that the brand possess thus posting a significant impact of brand image as a mediating variable. While finding out the impact of store image on purchase intention of ready to cook items, brand image was used as mediating variable which yield positive results while showing significance between store and brand image as well as brand image and purchase intention (Wu et al., 2011).

*H2: Brand image mediates the relation between perception of counterfeits of luxury brands and customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands.*

### 2.4 Mediating role of Brand Awareness:

According to Brondoni (2001) when similar products are being offered in the market with competitive product features and price then brand awareness play a critical role in providing an edge to the brand as purchase of a particular demand depends upon the consumers' decision and brand

awareness is the main factor that influences that decision. Brand Awareness has been used as a mediating variable by Shabbir et al. (2010) while finding the impact of cause related marketing on the consumers purchase intention as people purchase more of a product if the product succeeds in developing an emotional attachment with the customers based on their provision of social benefits like on the Worlds AIDS Day, Star Bucks donates 5 Cents on every beverage bought so the marketing is being done as well as the social benefits of the society are being met.

In a research work, while examining brand knowledge, Chen & He (2010) studied brand awareness as an element of brand knowledge that mediates the relation between online advertisement and purchase intention towards shopping products. The basic purpose for using a mediating variable is to find the difference of the direct impact of an independent variable on dependent variable and to see how a mediator affects their relationship. Chakraborty et al. (1997), found the impact of cloth branding on the purchase intention of counterfeit fashion products with mediating effect of brand awareness and found that the brand awareness plays a significant part in altering the impact of cloth branding on purchase intent of customer towards counterfeit fashion products.

The clear impact of Brand Awareness as a mediating variable was seen by Qasim et al., (2017) in his research work in which it was hypothesized that how brand awareness mediates the relation between two independent variables Brand Loyalty and Brand Image and dependent variable Brand Equity and it was found that brand loyalty and brand image has a positive impact on brand awareness and brand awareness significantly mediates the relation between dependent and independent variables.

*H3: Brand awareness mediates the relation between perception of counterfeits of luxury brands and customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands.*

### 2.5 Basis for Mediating role of Brand Image and Brand Awareness:

The basis for finding out the mediating impact of brand awareness and brand image was to bridge up the relation between the dependent and independent variable. If an image of the luxury brand is built up in mind, it might change the impact of counterfeit perception on purchase intention of genuine brands. Same is the case with brand awareness as it is the power of a brand to get recalled and recognized while a consumer is going to make a purchase. So the perception of counterfeits, while impacting the purchase intention of luxury brands, could get altered in presence brand awareness as mediating variable.

## III. HYPOTHETICAL MODEL

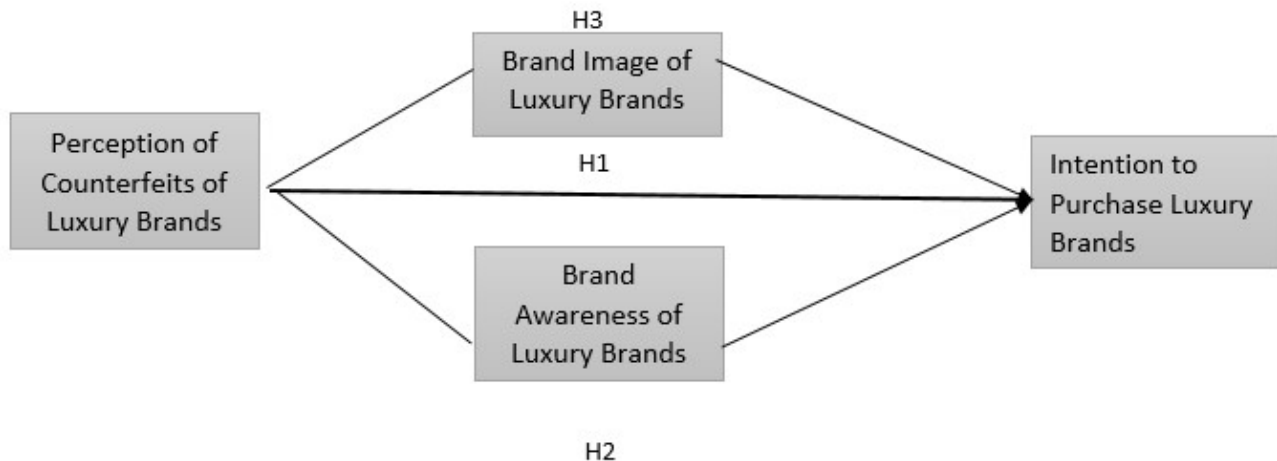


Figure 1

#### IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research being conducted is deductive, quantitative, descriptive and empirical in nature as it suits the requirements.

#### V. POPULATION

In terms of population, 4 known cities of Pakistan including three metropolitan cities have been chosen including Bahawalpur, Multan, Lahore and Islamabad. The population is constituted of all the counterfeit users in these cities thus making the population indefinite. The luxury brands taken for this study are Luxury Mobile Phones, Luxury Watches, Luxury Perfumes, and Luxury Glasses. The counterfeits of all these luxury products exist in the market and are easily available for purchase.

#### VI. SAMPLE SIZE

As in the current situation, the population is indefinite so In order to get a valid sample size the sample of 240 was taken keeping in mind the sample calculation method given by Bentler & Chou (1987). Through use of convenient sampling, a total of 240 questionnaire were distributed out of 217 were properly responded and filled up which was then added to SPSS version 20 for data analysis and interpretation.

#### VII. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The data has been collected from walk in customers at shopping malls and retail markets of Bahawalpur, Multan, Lahore and Islamabad on random basis including both males and females based on a structured questionnaire formed on likert scale.

Table1: Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Scales Proposed by	Year
Brand Image	Fianto et al.	2014
Brand Awareness	Gunawardane	2015

Perception of Counterfeit	Cademan et al.	2012
Purchase Intention	Bian & Forsythe	2012

#### VIII. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Descriptive regarding demographics are given in form of tables below.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive	Category	Frequency	Percent
Qualification	Doctorate	1	0.5
	M.Phil	40	18.4
	Master	92	42.4
	Bachelor	69	31.8
	Intermediate	11	5.1
	Others	4	1.8
Marital Status	Single	136	62.7
	Married	81	37.3
City	Bahawalpur	38	17.5
	Multan	51	23.5
	Lahore	66	30.4
	Islamabad	62	28.6
Age	18-25	77	35.5
	25-32	82	37.8
	32-39	37	17.1
	39-46	11	5.1
	46-52	4	1.8
	52-59	3	1.4
	Over 59	3	1.4
Gender	Female	84	38.7
	Male	133	61.3

### IX. RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Cronbach Alpha is the most commonly used measure of reliability. In this case, it has been applied to find out the reliability of the scale items which revealed the following results. The standard value Cronbach alpha by most of the authors is set to be more than 0.6, which is applicable to our in case of study.

TABLE 3: RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Counterfeit Perception	0.738	5
Brand Awareness	0.630	3
Brand Image	0.807	4
Purchase Intention	0.793	4

### X. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Correlation Analysis has been used to find out the intensity of linear relationship between two variables. Coefficient of correlation has a range that varies from +1 to -1 where +1 depicts the existence of a positive relationship between two variables, -1 illustrates the existence of a negative relationship while perfect 0 shows non-existence of any relationship between variables (Mazuruse, 2014). As in the current study, the values show that Perception of Counterfeits has a negative relation with Purchase Intention of genuine luxury brands while a positive relation with the two mediators Brand Image and Brand Awareness. Further, Purchase Intention has a strong positive relation with Brand Image as well as Brand

Awareness and the two mediators Brand Image and Brand Awareness are also highly correlated with each other.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

	Mean	Standard Deviation	CP	PI	BA	BI
CP	2.21	0.56				
PI	2.82	0.57	-0.053			
BA	2.64	0.49	0.064	0.118		
BI	2.81	0.51	0.035	0.424**	0.396**	

Note. \*\* Values are significant at 1%; \*Values are significant at 5%

Note: (CP= Counterfeit Perception; PI= Purchase Intention; BA=Brand Awareness; BI=Brand image)

### XI. HIERARCHAL REGRESSION (MEDIATION ANALYSIS)

In order to test each and every hypothesis, hierarchal regression is applied. In which each variable's relation with the other is tested through linear regression in SPSS-20. It would be a 4 step process to pinpoint the role of mediating variable in a given model. Phase 1: A unit change in the independent variable accounts for a significant change in the mediator(s) shown in table 3. Phase 2: Variation in the independent variable leads directly to a significant change in the dependent variable. Phase 3: Both the mediators and the independent variable significantly leads to variation in the dependent variable. Phase 4: the level of variation in the Phase 2 & Phase 3 is compared (Baron & Kenny 1986).

Figure 2

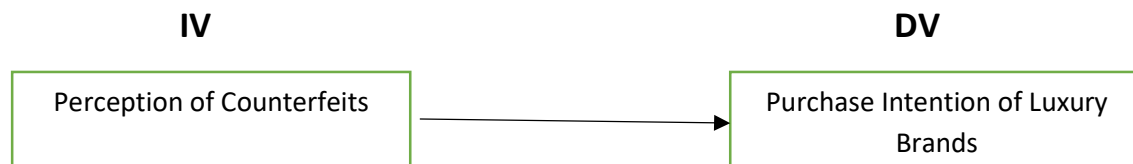


Table 5

R <sup>2</sup>	T – Value	Beta
0.328	-5.792 (0.000)	-0.061 (0.000)

Significance ( $p < 0.05$ )

Above table explains the direct impact of independent variable (Perception of Counterfeits) on the dependent variable (Purchase Intention of Luxury Brands). The value of Beta shows that 1 unit change in the independent variable brings about -0.061 unit change in the dependent variable thus depicting a negative relationship between the two variables. T

value to be -5.792 shows the model to be significant. Both Beta & T-Value were found to be significant at level of 0.000. R<sup>2</sup> represents the variation in data which ranges from 0% to 100%. The more is the percentage, the more is the variation, the better is the data collected. As R<sup>2</sup> in this case is 0.328 which is more than 0% so it shows the variation in data. The negative relation between independent and dependent variable could be better presented in form of an equation

Perception of Counterfeits = -0.061 Purchase Intention of Luxury Brands.

H1: Perception of Counterfeits of luxury brands has a negative impact on the customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands. (Accepted).



Figure 3

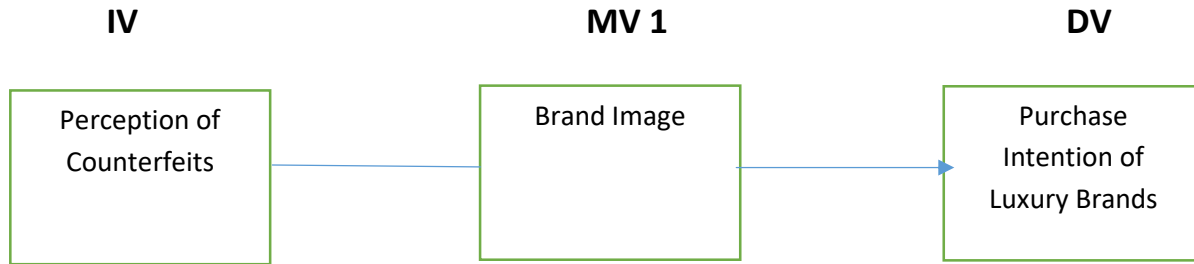


Table 6

R Square	T – Value	Beta
0.489	-4.867 (0.000)	-0.029 (0.000)

Significance ( $p < 0.05$ )

Above table explains the role of Brand Image as mediating variable which would impact the relation of Dependent Variable (Purchase Intention of Luxury Brands) and Independent Variable (Perception of Counterfeits). In table 4 it could be seen that the value of Beta for a direct relation between dependent and independent variable is -0.061 i.e. 1 unit change in independent variable brings -0.061 change in the dependent variable. But when Brand Image mediates the relation dependent and independent variable the effect is changed to -0.029. The difference can be find out through the following formula.

$$= [\beta_{\text{direct effect}} - \beta_{\text{indirect effect}}] / \beta_{\text{direct effect}} * 100$$

$$= (-0.061 - (-0.029)) / -0.061 * 100$$

$$= (-0.061 + 0.029) / -0.061 * 100$$

$$= 52.46 \%$$

It can be said based on the above calculation that level to which the unit of change variates in the presence of mediator is 52.46.

*H2: Brand image of luxury brands mediates the relation between perception of counterfeits of luxury brands and customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands (Accepted)*

Figure 4

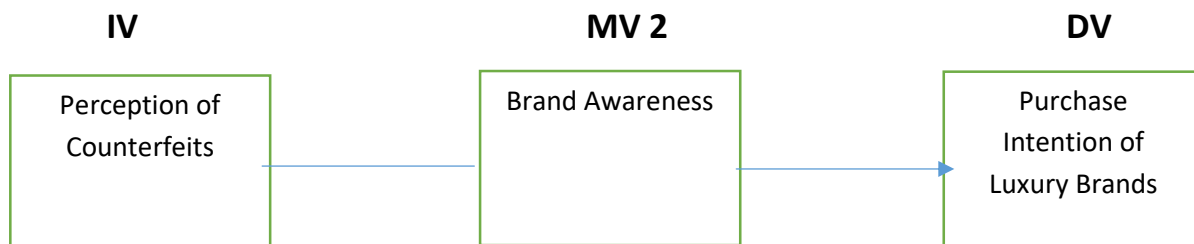


Table 7

R <sup>2</sup>	T - Value	Beta
0.419	-7.343 (0.002)	-0.046 (0.002)

Significance ( $p < 0.05$ )

Above table explains the role of Brand Awareness as mediating variable which would impact the relation of Dependent Variable (Purchase Intention of Luxury Brands) and Independent Variable (Perception of Counterfeits). In table 4 it could be seen that the value of Beta for a direct relation between dependent and independent variable is -0.046 i.e. 1 unit change in independent variable brings -0.046 change in the dependent variable. But when Brand Awareness

mediates the relation between dependent and independent variable the effect is changed to -0.046. The difference can be find out through the following formula.

$$= [\beta_{\text{direct effect}} - \beta_{\text{indirect effect}}] / \beta_{\text{direct effect}} * 100$$

$$= [(-0.061 - (-0.046)) / -0.061] * 100$$

$$= [-0.061 + 0.046 / -0.061] * 100$$

$$= 24.59 \%$$

It can be said based on the above calculation that level to which the unit of change variates in the presence of mediator is 24.59%

*H3: Brand awareness of luxury brands mediates the relation between perception of counterfeits of luxury brands and*

*customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands (Accepted)*

Two type of mediations exists in research work. One is partial mediation and other is full mediation. In this case, partial mediation occurs as the direct relation between counterfeit's perception and purchase intention of luxury brands and brand awareness and brand image mediate the relationship between the two variables with the percentages given above.

Table 8: Hypothesis Status

Sr. #	Hypothesis	Status
1	<i>Perception of Counterfeits of luxury brands has a negative impact on the customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands.</i>	Accepted
2	<i>Brand image mediates the relation between perception of counterfeits of luxury brands and customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands.</i>	Accepted
3	<i>Brand awareness of luxury brands mediates the relation between perception of counterfeits of luxury brands and customers' intention to purchase genuine luxury brands.</i>	Accepted

## XII. CONCLUSION

Through over all research done on the concept of perception of counterfeits and its impact on the purchase intention of genuine luxury brands, it can be concluded that perception of anything in the mind affects our behavior and attitude towards it and things related to it. Like in this study perception of counterfeits which was taken as the independent variable has significant impact on the purchase intention of genuine luxury brands with Beta vale of -0.061. Though the relation found between the perception of counterfeits and purchase intention of luxury brands was negative but it represented a dual perspective. The reason being counterfeits exist in the market of those brands only which have worth in the market, are expensive, their ownership reflects a specific class of the society of which everyone want to be part of (Rod et al., 2015). Counterfeits of normal brands which don't represent a specific class wouldn't exist in the market. So people having positive perception of counterfeits consider it as an opportunity to join the high society at a much lower cost. People having negative perception regrading counterfeits are mostly those who are quality conscious and believe that these counterfeits shouldn't exist in the market but they still go for the counterfeits as an economical solution to their needs and have high purchase intention towards the genuine ones subject to their purchasing power because to some extent the counterfeits are promoting the genuine ones. Even if we talk about the Pakistan's market, counterfeits are mostly purchased by the lower middle and upper middle class which finds it difficult to pay for the expensive genuine luxury brands (Chaudhary et al., 2014). Further as brand image and brand awareness are tools for enhancement or decrease in the sales of a particular brand, so the mediating role was observed which revealed positive results.

### 12.1 Recommendations:

Seeing the practical exposure, counterfeits have always been perceived to be a threat for the luxury brand industry, and the sales are to thought to be fallen down in presence of counterfeits in the market. But as in this case, it can be seen that those who can't afford genuine luxury brands would preferably go for the counterfeits depending on their perception and the ones having a negative perception could be potential customers for the genuine ones in future as it is only the matter of their purchasing power which could change with time. So presence of counterfeits can act as a promotional tool for those genuine luxury brands and the luxury brand manufacturers on the basis of this study can device some awareness programs to differ between the actual and fake one. There would be a positive contribution to the theoretical as well as practical world.

### 12.2 Direction for Future Research:

Current study would led the researchers to dig down much deep into the current scenario. There would be more room for the scholars to research the subject of counterfeiting as significance of the mediating impact of elements of brand knowledge (brand image & brand awareness) would encourage them to know the impact of other mediating as well as moderating variables on the counterfeit impact on genuine luxury brands. Further, impact of more than one variable can be seen on the purchase intention of customers towards genuine luxury brands which could result in different outcomes and a comparison could be made among the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable.

The difference of opinion between male and female respondents can be seen and treated separately after which the results can be matched for seeing whether both gender have same impact of perception of counterfeits on their purchase intention of luxury brands or there appears any differences. Further, impact of more than one variable can be seen in future researches on the purchase intention of customers towards genuine luxury brands which could result in different outcomes and a comparison could be made among the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable.

### 12.3 Limitations:

Just like of every research, this one also carries on some limitations, the study was carried out in major cities only as in these cities awareness about counterfeits and luxury brands is mostly a bit more but even in small towns the research could be carried out and a comparison could be made between the developed and underdeveloped cities of Pakistan.

Further the data was collected from Shopping Malls and Retail Markets, the window could be broaden by collecting data from different places like Universities, Private & Public Offices rather than just shopping places.

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