

Mandatory Assignment Cover Sheet

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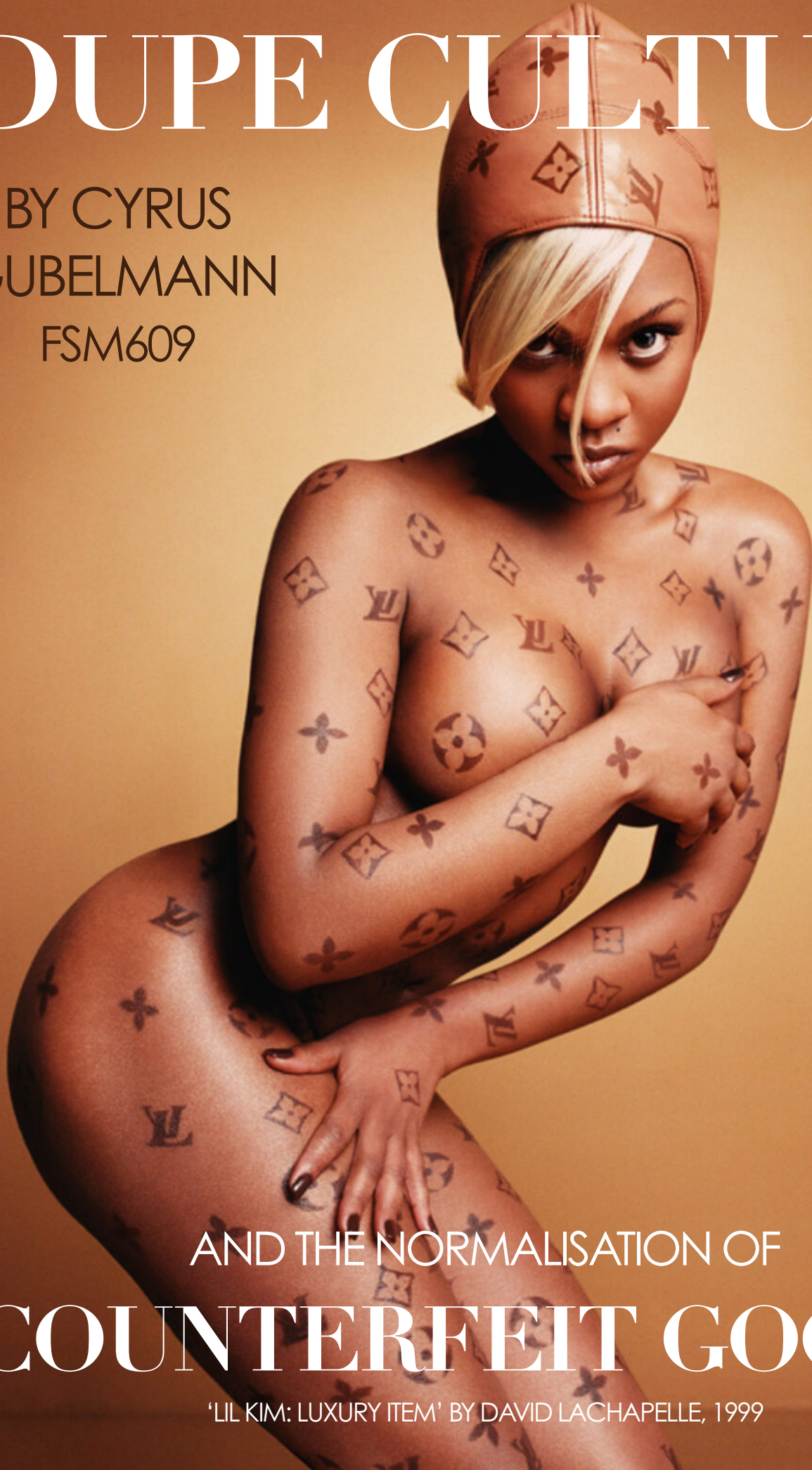
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DUPE CULTURE

NOV

BY CYRUS
GUBELMANN
FSM609



AND THE NORMALISATION OF
COUNTERFEIT GOODS

'LIL KIM: LUXURY ITEM' BY DAVID LACHAPELLE, 1999

DUPE CULTURE
AND THE
NORMALISATION
OF COUNTERFEIT
GOODS

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INTRODUCTION

*D*upe culture is an undeniably large part of the fashion industry. In recent years, the topic seems to have become much less taboo, and shamelessly talked about. The rising cost of living, and the rapidly increasing prices luxury fashion demands creates the perfect storm for consumers to accept that they cannot afford or do not want to spend their money on these items. In this project, the topic and the psychology behind it is explored, building off of the content of the AC1 project.



NEW YORK TIMES

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

*T*he goal of this project is to understand the opinions people have on the counterfeit industry. This was done by conducting interviews, and running an anonymous survey with the goal of creating a safe space where people feel they can be honest. The aim is to answer the questions “Why do people buy fakes?” and “What does this practice say about the individual?”.



NAMILIA S/S 2024

METHODOLOGY

*F*or this project, I had used two different types of research approaches to gather the information needed. The first method I used was an anonymous Qualtrics survey. I decided to use this to gather information so the participant would feel comfortable being honest if they had purchased any counterfeit items. The second method I used was an interview I conducted with a fellow Regents student. It was very helpful because she gave me more detailed answers to these questions.



TREND OVERVIEW

*T*he trend at hand is the increase in popularity of counterfeit goods and ‘dupe’s. In recent years, the public’s perception of fake goods has shifted. People feel comfortable buying fakes and are putting aside their morals to quickly get the satisfaction of having the item they desire. This surge in popularity is thanks to online platforms like TikTok where people share their purchases, and Reddit, where people teach others how and where to buy these items.



TREND OVERVIEW

In AC1, I explored this topic by looking at three different online moments where the counterfeit industry has impacted businesses and individuals alike.

The first example used was the major scandal the Darnell sisters experienced after boasting about their Christmas presents, which consisted of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of luxury goods. Almost immediately after posting, their followers grew suspicious of the authenticity of the items they received. The sisters showcased items that luxury brands had never produced, prompting an internet-wide study of the other items featured in their videos (Marcias, G. 2024). The audience quickly debunked the items as fake. After these videos received backlash, the sisters



TREND OVERVIEW

claimed that their presents were all authentic and that the luxury resale platform, The RealReal, sold them counterfeit goods. The RealReal quickly responded, insinuating that the sisters had never purchased anything from them, and told the sisters to contact them, essentially clearing their brand's image.

Another example illustrated in AC1 was when a series of TikTok videos came out where counterfeit factories in China claimed to be the manufacturers of Hermes handbags. This caused an uproar, with people who had purchased Hermes handbags vehemently insisting that this was a lie, and that the bags were all made in Paris by trained artisans, as advertised. On the other hand, many people believed this wholeheartedly and used this claim as justification for buying fake bags from Chinese factories

TREND OVERVIEW

(News.com.au, 2025) After this became more and more widespread, Hermes themselves made a response, where they documented their factories and the artisans hand-making their items, as they have shown time and time again.

The final example illustrated in AC1 was how Marcello Gaia, founder of clothing brand Mirror Palais, has been greatly affected by 'dupes' by massive fast fashion conglomerates. He posted a TikTok video where he made a bold claim 'I am the biggest fast-fashion designer in the world'. He clarified that this is due to the shocking amount of copies that fast-fashion manufacturers have created of his designs. His small brand makes their clothes in small quantities. Their mid-range luxury prices reflect the quality and time that goes into creating their designs.

TREND OVERVIEW

He has been extremely transparent with his costs and how he prices things. In one video, he documented how an extremely complicated and time-consuming draped chainmail dress, which he sells for \$1,795 cost over \$600 to produce (Gaia, 2025). This, coupled with the time needed to research and develop this garment, makes it extremely reasonable for the quality.

These three examples demonstrate some of the different ways can negatively effect people. Whether it be losing your credibility as a public personality, having your brand lose appeal because of the quality of the counterfeits, or having your intellectual property stolen as a small creator, the counterfeit industry consistently harms people in a number of ways.

TREND OVERVIEW

These three issues were major cultural moments within the past year. Despite these major harms that the counterfeit industry brings to people, consumers still feel comfortable purchasing their fake goods. This goes back to the question “What does the practice of buying fake goods say about the consumer?”. It is nearly impossible to be interested in fashion and not know of at least one of these moments from 2025.

This says that although the consumer sees the problems and risks associated with the fake industry, they find it worth it to get their hands on the item they desire. It shows some level of selfishness, as they know it harms both large and small businesses (i.e. Mirror Palais and Hermes) but decide to purchase the items anyway.

TREND OVERVIEW

This still begs the question, “Why do people purchase counterfeit items?” despite knowing the risks. By running an anonymous survey and having an interview with a fellow Regents student, I was able to receive opinions from others within the mostly Gen-Z, crowd at Regents.



CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN 'SO KATE 120'

A COAT BY DAPPER DAN



FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

An anonymous survey created via Qualtrics was sent out to over 20 different people. I had sent the link to a few friends, and asked them to share it with people who they believed would be interested in participating. The results gave me lots of insight, by allowing me to hear peoples' true experiences and opinions. In total, the survey was completed by 20 women and 3 men (23 people total). Out of these 23, 16 were between the ages of 18-24, 3 were between the ages of 25-34, 1 between the ages of 35-44, and 1 person older than 45 (2 people did not fill out their age).

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

14 of the 23 people described themselves as upper class, and 9 described themselves as middle class.

Interestingly, no one described themselves as lower class. The survey revealed that more than 43.4% of these respondents had purchased a fake item at some point in their life. According to the Guardian, "It is estimated that 80% of us have handled or falsified goods (whether wittingly or not)" (Sherwood, A, 2022).

It is interesting to compare these two statistics. Multiple reasons could be at fault for this discrepancy. The small size of the group assessed, and the hesitancy to answer honestly are two logistical factors which could effect this answer. The concentration of fashion students and socioeconomic status of the group are likely why the number of buyers is almost half of that from The Guardian.



VOGUE ONLINE

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The survey also posed the question, "How many counterfeit goods do you see on a daily basis", to which 1.3% responded 0, 43.4% responded 1-3, 43.4% responded 4+. This is all solely based on what the participant is actually able to identify as a fake item. The likelihood is that the number they encounter on a daily basis is much higher, due to the increasing accuracy and quality of these fake items.

While these statistics answer the questions of how popular the practice of purchasing fake items is, the question "Why do people purchase counterfeit goods?" still goes unanswered. When given a multiple choice prompt in the survey, the results were as follows: 32.56% of people believed it was because the person liked the style of the item but could not afford the authentic. 34.88% believed it was because the person wanted to present as though they are wealthier than they are. 13.95% believed it was because they could afford the authentic but preferred to save money. And 18.6% believe it is because they are not content with the value for the quality of the authentic.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The two most popular answers were that the person purchases fake goods because they liked the style of the item but could not afford the authentic, and that the person wanted to present as though they are wealthier than they are.

For my second form of primary research, I interviewed one of my closest friends, who is also a student at Regents. She is very passionate about fashion and has an incredibly impressive wardrobe. We have had conversations around this topic many times before, but I asked her more broad versions of the questions posed on the survey, hoping to get a more detailed answer that was not just multiple choice.

When asked about why she believes people buy fake goods, especially within our community, she highlighted how she feels people want to fit in, and have the same items as their peers, even if they do not have the resources to access them. I asked how she believes people justify these purchases, considering the counterfeit industry supports

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

things like terrorism and slave labour. She said that she thinks people do not really pay attention to this aspect of it. She said “I don’t think people are aware of what they are actually supporting” when buying these items.



FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

As covered in AC1, one of the biggest contributors to this industry are online communities like Reddit where groups like r/RepLadiesDesigner share their experiences and promote sellers for their counterfeit goods. While the general sentiment towards fake goods will be biased due to the nature of the community, I asked ChatGPT to run a sentiment analysis of what goes on in the community. The AI reported “The r/RepladiesDesigner community generally expresses pragmatic acceptance of replicas: many view high-quality counterfeits as a cost-efficient alternative to luxury goods and feel the visual difference from authentic items is minimal . Some emphasise that replicas provide desired aesthetics without luxury pricing . However, ethical, legal,



FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

and reputational concerns are noted, including worry over fines, opaque supply chains, and discomfort with passing fakes off as real . Overall sentiment skews moderately positive toward purchasing replicas for personal use, while caution remains around authenticity claims and legal risks". (OpenAI, 2025).



KEY IMPACTS

Counterfeit goods and the normalisation of the counterfeit industry directly illustrate the new values consumers have in 2025. Buyers now prioritise social status and aesthetics over the heritage, intellectual property, and craftsmanship that come with the practice of buying authentic luxury goods. Whether the buyer is aware of the harm that comes from black market luxury items or not, morality seems to be an afterthought when making a purchase.

Dupes and counterfeit goods do not fall under any specific point in the Rodgers Diffusion of Innovation curve, it transcends the chart. All sorts of items, from well known Louis Vuitton handbags, to niche Christophe Lemaire accessories, *everything* seems to be at risk of being counterfeited. All items and styles at all points of Rodgers Diffusion of Innovation curve can be faked, making this concept all-encompassing.

KEY IMPACTS

As evidenced by the Hermes scandal previously discussed, a large concentration of knockoff goods can weaken a brand's image and prestige. Some consumers no longer care about supporting the fashion houses who create the designs. To combat this, brands need to be more transparent with their pricing, like Marcello Gaia of Mirror Palais has been. Another way brands can reach these consumers is by creating more items at entry-level pricepoints, and embracing the resale market. Oscar de La Renta and Gucci have both launched their own resale platforms, which allow clients to find unique items at potentially lower costs.

The counterfeit industry is an unfortunate part of fashion which will likely never go away, but consumers are losing interest in authentic goods. Transparency and embracing accessible practices like the secondhand market are going to be imperative to change the minds of Gen-Z.

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