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New research has revealed that consumers at both ends of the income spectrum are more likely to purchase counterfeit luxury goods than those in the middle-income group. | Source: Shutterstock

Research reveals unexpected counterfeit luxury purchasing patterns

Posted July 07, 2026 | By Jeweller Staff

New research has revealed that consumers at opposite ends of the income spectrum are more likely to purchase counterfeit luxury goods than those in the middle-income group.

The study challenges the belief that affordability is the primary reason for counterfeit purchases. By analysing millions of US counterfeit purchases on an international e-commerce platform, researchers found that identity, aspiration, and status influence buying decisions. Nan Chen, one of the study's co-authors at the National University of Singapore, highlighted the complexity of buying counterfeit luxury goods.

"Our findings challenge the common assumption that counterfeit purchasing is primarily a budget-driven phenomenon," he said.

"Instead, demand appears to be strongest at both ends of the income spectrum, suggesting that social, psychological and status-related motivations play an important role."

Among lower-income consumers, counterfeit versions of entry-level luxury brands proved more popular. In contrast, higher-income consumers favoured counterfeit versions of ultra-luxury brands and prioritised higher-quality replicas over lower prices.

Across income groups, counterfeit versions of iconic luxury products with broad brand recognition attracted more buyers than less recognisable collections.

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Researchers also found that the income-related demand pattern was stronger for niche counterfeit products than for widely purchased items, suggesting that some consumers value exclusivity alongside price and status. This pattern was more pronounced for niche counterfeit products, highlighting exclusivity as an additional purchasing factor.

Luxury brands, intellectual property owners and policymakers may need to develop anti-counterfeiting strategies that extend beyond price-sensitive consumers. Co-author Yao Xiang of the National University of Singapore underscored the importance of understanding counterfeit demand.

"For brand owners and enforcement agencies, understanding who buys counterfeits, and why they do, is essential," he said.

"Strategies designed around a single consumer profile may overlook substantial counterfeit demand among both affluent and economically constrained consumers."

The research also identified e-commerce platforms as an increasing challenge for luxury brands seeking to protect their intellectual property and brand value.

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NAN CHEN, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

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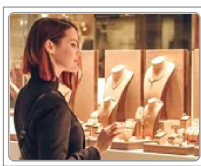
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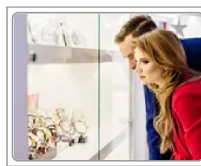
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