

2022

## Strategies to Combat Counterfeit Products in Eswatini

Siphiwe Promise Mainjeni  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Siphiwe Mainjeni

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Review Committee

Dr. Michael Lavelle, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Betsy Macht, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Ify Diala-Nettles, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Strategies Used to Combat Counterfeit Products in Eswatini

by

Siphiwe Mainjeni

M.S., University of Wisconsin Stout 2013

B.S., University of Wisconsin Stout 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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## Abstract

Managers of luxury brands lack strategies to deal with counterfeit products' influence on their brands. The failure to maintain processes to avoid counterfeits in business can adversely impact business profitability and sustainability. Grounded in the resource-based view framework, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies managers of luxury brands in Eswatini, Sub-Saharan Africa, use to avoid counterfeits in their brands. Participants were nine business leaders from nine luxury brand businesses in Eswatini, Sub-Saharan Africa, who implemented strategies to prevent counterfeits in their brands. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and reviews of company reports. Through thematic analysis, four themes prevailed: (a) training, (b) innovation, (c) culture, and (d) teamwork. A key recommendation is for luxury brand leaders to sell handcrafted products, which are very difficult to copy. The implications for positive social include the potential for managers in the luxury brand businesses in Eswatini, Sub-Saharan Africa, to avoid counterfeits in their brands, thus enhancing business profitability and sustainability.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to God; my husband, Wilfred; my two sons, Tayamika and Chimwemwe Mainjeni; my dear and loving friends Dr. Lydia Chowa and Dr. Thule Mdletshe for moral support; and my prayerful group of friends and family members who prayed for my success tirelessly—Thoko, Myzo, Lindelwa, Khiphile, Zakithi, and Ziyanda.

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## **Section 1: Foundation of the Study**

Business leaders are responsible for ensuring that their organizations stay attuned to the operating environment while serving the evolving customer base. Customers are at the center of business. Steps such as trust building, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty are essential in a business-customer relationship (Smaliukiene et al., 2020). The groundwork entails corporate transformative thinking and surfaced as a base for developing sustainable business policy and organization development strategy (Bukusi, 2020). Ensuring the best service and avoiding pitfalls that can be detrimental to customers should be every business leader's responsibility; therefore, avoiding counterfeits is one distinct protective responsibility for leaders to exert in their leadership (Bukusi, 2020).

The leadership of any organization should be responsible for maintaining noncounterfeit services. Customers should be informed and guided accordingly in their purchasing decisions. Leadership in organizations should exert their power to help customers avoid counterfeits all the time (Isleven, 2017). The existing counterfeit problem has been lingering in organizations and needs eradication solutions by introducing new strategies. Regardless of numerous reasons for purchasing counterfeits, there should be a solution to help customers make good purchasing decisions. Sharma and Chan (2017) postulated that people bought counterfeit luxury goods for status and belonging, reasons that are social adjustive and value expressive.

## **Background of the Problem**

The counterfeit problem dates to 27 B.C. Lai and Zaichkowsky's (1999) description of counterfeits is that the manufacturer produces with the intent of deceiving the customer by leading consumers to believe that they are purchasing genuine artifacts. The truth about the product lies in the manufacturer's manual. Since ancient times, the relationship between counterfeit products and brands has existed (Evans et al., 2019). McMahon et al. (2014) suggested that emerging innovation brings proactive strategies for eradicating counterfeits and implementing anti-counterfeit strategies.

The Sub-Saharan African major paradigm shifts in leadership compel leaders to draw on suitable leadership competencies to grow businesses in an environment that requires development, a social contribution, and innovation (McMahon et al., 2014). The use of different leadership techniques will help managers use an anti-counterfeit business strategy. Evans et al. (2019) clarified that using an anti-counterfeit process would help control counterfeiting by developing deep and inimitable relationships among managers and other investors in marketing systems.

The existing problem of counterfeits has intensified in all business avenues—the food industry, drug industry, fashion industry, and more. In many sectors, counterfeits have created a health hazard and sometimes led to mortalities. Ormar (2017) defined how faking and counterfeiting drugs also introduced rigorous drug regulation across many countries.

The history of counterfeiting is the reason for my study. Close to 5% of the total world trade of customer industrial products are accounted for by importing fraudulent

goods and services (Harvey, 1987). The counterfeit problem originated in the 1960s following the thalidomide disaster (Bernstein, 1997). My study focused on luxury brands because their classic and unique nature is targeted for counterfeits because of their exceptional value (Srisomthavil & Assarut, 2018). Vigneron and Johnson (2004) suggested that superior quality is an essential component of luxury goods.

While some business leaders have embraced the outstanding value of luxury brands, it has been a perpetual problem for leaders in the luxury brand industry to eradicate counterfeits. Scholars addressed different ideologies to help solve the existing counterfeit problem globally; there is still no solution. Pandey and Litoriya (2021) asserted that the problematic situation stems from the current counterfeit global issue and suggested an imminent solution using the blockchain network and a record of product logistics to help managers curb the problem. The company's investigation and compliance software helps institutions identify hacked or stolen funds, making blockchain access safer and more accessible (Turjo et al., 2021). Though not as dangerous and life-threatening as counterfeits in the global pharmaceutical market, counterfeits in the luxury brand market are disruptive. Business leaders in the luxury brand industry face challenges in avoiding counterfeits and initiating tangible strategies to help customers make purchasing decisions. Song et al. (2021) suggested that the dominance of counterfeit products negatively impacts the purchase intention of authentic brands for customers with weak social-adjustive attitudes.

A business exists only because of its customers. Customers need to be prepared to pay more for sustainable products; they will then experience moral fulfillment when



purchasing (Mostaghel & Chirumalla, 2021). The customer's disposition and intention to purchase from the same company emanate from the view that the value received from the same firm is superior to the transaction offered from alternatives (Chikazhe et al., 2020). The relationships begin when customers and companies maintain good trade relations. Previous studies confirm that corporate social responsibility, brand awareness, and customer loyalty link to supporting improved customer and company relations (Aggarwal & Singh, 2019). The customers always contribute to the progression of the organization. Prior research proved that customers are an integral part of the business.

### **Problem Statement**

Counterfeiting is a worldwide problem targeting luxury brands. Today's marketplace offers customers many choices; to select from counterfeit or genuine luxury brands is a major one (Wu et al., 2017). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported counterfeiting losses estimated at US\$461 billion in 2013, roughly 2.5 percent of world trade (Evans et al., 2019). The general business problem is that the proliferation of counterfeit luxury products negatively affects the company brand. The specific business problem is that luxury brand managers lack strategies to deal with counterfeit products' influence on their brands.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the proposed qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies that luxury brand managers use to deal with counterfeit products' influence on their brands. I will focus on Eswatini luxury products that are locally manufactured and handcrafted from Swazi indigenous raw materials. These luxury products contain local

natural resources like copper, animal skins, cotton, silk, bamboo, linen, leather, and gold (Cervellon, 2013). Luxury goods are also supposed to exploit natural resources that are rare and not necessarily renewable (Cervellon, 2013). Luxury brands have qualities that distinguish them from other non-luxury brands (Romaniuk & Huang, 2020). The targeted population will be composed of managers from nine luxury brand manufacturing organizations and handicraft centers in Eswatini, Sub-Saharan Africa. Managers in manufacturing organizations know that the products they have first-hand information about might be reliable sources for sharing information. My proposed research might enable managers of luxury brands to learn how to avoid counterfeits of their brands. My research results may impact positive social change; the study results might help local businesses increase employment in the local community and improve their quality of life.

### **Nature of the Study**

There are three research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method. I selected the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. A researcher uses a qualitative approach to emphasize how people interpret and understand their experiences to comprehend an individual's social reality (Mohajan, 2018). Quantitative researchers measure variables (Saunders et al., 2015). I will not count the research variables, making the quantitative method inappropriate for my proposed study. I want to identify luxury brand managers' strategies to deal with counterfeit products' influence on their brands. Researchers who use a mixed-method approach combine qualitative and quantitative data patterns. Integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches provides more in-depth insights than either method alone (Mariani & Baggio,

2020). My use of the qualitative method will support greater openness and flexibility in the research process. The mixed-method approach and quantitative methods do not align with the planned research.

I have chosen the multiple case study design for my study. Using a multiple case study, a researcher can collect precise data without ambiguity (Yin, 2018). Researchers who use the phenomenology design study an individual's lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). In ethnography design, the researcher becomes absorbed in the participants' daily lives to observe their behavior and then understand the culture or societal group and systems (Yin, 2018). The phenomenological design was unsuitable because it requires a long observation, and the researcher focused on participants' lived experiences. The ethnography design is not appropriate because the participant's lifetime and family practices are not the focus of the proposed study. I intend to explore multiple cases to develop a deep understanding. I do not plan to explore an individual's lived experiences.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do luxury brand managers use to deal with counterfeit products' influence on their brands?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies did you develop over the years that helped you determine the influence of counterfeits threats on your products in both in-store and online markets?
2. What strategies have proven to be the most successful in training employees to help educate potential customers concerning the adverse effect of counterfeit products on the country's economy.

3. What processes did you put in place that helped your organization implement your strategies to remain viable, avoiding counterfeits when your organization identified the risk?
4. How did the organization prepare to develop and implement strategies for counterfeiting, are there any adjustments made to your strategy implementation?
5. How did the organizations' management team corroborate strategies for identifying counterfeits influence their brands?
6. What additional information or comments can you add to my understanding of your strategies for maintaining authentic luxury brands use to deal with the influence of counterfeit products.

### **Conceptual Framework**

I chose the resource-based theory RBV developed by Barney (1991) as the conceptual framework to support my proposed study. The four tenets of the RBV theory are that luxury products are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. The four tenets emphasize the need for a company to acquire and organize its rights as a pivotal point for a competitive advantage. Consequently, it will help identify each organization's awareness of themes and how they relate to its success.

Also, organizational leaders should understand the firm's resources that support a sustained competitive advantage (Ardaneswari et al., 2020). Barney (1991) theorized that an organization would achieve a position of a continuous competitive advantage if it has the capabilities of resources that are (a) valuable (not available to other competitors); (b) rare (RBV theory holds that when resources are unique, competitors have difficulty

reproducing them); (c) inimitable (authenticity gives a distinct, credible feel that differentiates the resources from other brands); and (d) non-substitutable (resources are not substitutable and cannot be reproduced). As applied to this study, RBV theory clarifies the strategies leaders in organizations use to avoid counterfeits of their brands. A firm can exploit these to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Counterfeiting:* Continues to be a growing problem around the world. Customers prefer counterfeits because they are cheaper than authentic brands (Toklu & Baran, 2017). Counterfeiting is a trend that imitates the original.

*Luxury brands:* Confers prestige on customers who only exhibit and use them. They are unique in their design. Luxury brands are perceived to carry a premium price and higher quality, be more exclusive, and be rare (Moreau et al., 2020).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Armstrong and Kepler (2018) described assumptions as unexamined beliefs that may clarify the research design of any empirical study that purports to test a particular theory. The first assumption is the belief that participants have implemented successful strategies to curb the existing counterfeit problem. The second assumption is that participants will answer interview questions accurately. Lastly, the researcher will assume that participants' answers will be helpful to answer the research question and that the solution will be beneficial to formulate in-depth results for the proposed study.

## **Limitations**

Dowling et al. (2018) described limitations as pitfalls that may be unavoidable and may arise during the study. The first limitation is the present situation regarding the Covid-19 inconsistencies globally; the pandemic might hinder possible connection with the participants for face-to-face interviews given the closure of organizations. Finally, the case study results will relate to the luxury brand industry and may not apply to other business industries in Eswatini.

## **Delimitations**

Researchers articulate the boundaries of the context or the case and make choices about the unit and level of analysis given the research question (Mele et al., 2020). The researcher served as a primary instrument in some process studies to make the task successful. The researcher might limit the target population to six leaders from the initial nine as initially projected. Another delimitation was a focus on business leaders with a minimum practice of three years. Finally, the target population was composed of participants from the country of Eswatini in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Significance of the Study**

The study findings could be valuable to businesses by providing successful strategies that the organization's leaders can benefit from and that can contribute to organizational growth. The results from my proposed study may contribute to business value growth while enhancing the anti-counterfeit strategies. The results may help the people of Eswatini by job creation opportunities and thus may help boost Eswatini's economy. Vredevelde and Coulter (2019) suggested that authenticity is a crucial marketing

concept for consumers' desire for consumption practices that carry genuine cultural and social meanings. The introduction of new strategies may help reduce counterfeit products and increase authenticity in luxury brands, adding value to the business.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The study results may help luxury brand managers avoid counterfeits in organizations through their knowledge sharing. The business value may include profiting local businesses, and residents will benefit through increased employment opportunities, improved tax revenue for the communities, and improved quality of life. The information may help an organization's future growth and help organizations gain a competitive advantage. Oladimeji et al. (2020) suggested a dynamic business environment categorized by highly competitive activities as an integral part of the global community. The study results may help luxury brand managers understand that a firm's sustainable competitive advantage survives under unique resource-based factors: (a) valuable, (b) rare, (c) difficult to imitate, and (d) inability to be substituted.

### **Contribution to Positive Social Change**

Positive social change can occur by applying strategies to prevent or decrease counterfeit products. Society members may gain a sense of security, knowing that firms contribute to reducing Eswatini's unemployment rates. Positive social change can occur when luxury brand organizations operate a fair-trade relation with global markets without counterfeits.

## **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

Over the years, the role of business leaders in organizations has evolved, challenging them to revamp market strategy and alter their business strategy to be a top brand recognized in the industry if they wish to remain competitive in business (Chattopadhyay et al., 2018). Through counterfeits, business leaders can look beyond customers' interest trajectories of global disputes (Chorev, 2015). Meaningful and concise information retrieved through tactful research work on the counterfeit topic has indicated to market leaders the potentially significant losses on the global retail market via product counterfeiting (Khalil et al., 2019). Khalil et al. (2019) discussed a four-step plan for distinguishing and developing a new strategy to detect and lessen counterfeiting activity.

The steps in the plan consist of (a) developing early threatening signals of counterfeiting, (b) budgeting to monitor and eradicate counterfeiting, (c) using demand-side systems to deter counterfeiting, and (d) using supply-side approaches to avert counterfeiting. Firms maintain customer centricity, putting customers' interests at the center of their actions (Habel et al., 2020). Companies are obligated to avoid counterfeits and help customers purchase authentic luxury brands. Herhausen et al. (2019) crafted a method for firms to engage in and disengage from online conversations with complaining customers.

Buyers must be satisfied, and their satisfaction with services preserves the business. Digital libraries (DLs) have become vital for identifying counterfeits (Singeh et al., 2020). Companies focus on providing accurate and precise information to customers



to ensure their acceptability when creating brand loyalty. Singeh et al. (2020) reinforced that critical success factor and how some of the success models, frameworks, and theories used in information systems research are tools for success. Creating accurate information entails using DLs to implement systems (Singeh et al., 2020). Also, success is defined as the development, evaluation, and interaction of the DL used by organizations worldwide.

The literature review starts with a brief argument and critical scrutiny of scholarly articles, journals, and seminal books. The purpose of my study was to explore strategies that luxury brand managers use to deal with counterfeit products' influence on their brands. Durantez-Stolle and Martinez-Sanz (2019) suggested that communicative strategy maintains a consistent style. The current technological, cultural, and social context encourages the exploitation of media convergence and the hybridizing of languages. The themes researched and discussed include: (a) management strategies in organizations, (b) counterfeit exploitation of luxury brands, (c) the influence of counterfeiters and the technique used to derail customers' purchasing decisions, and (d) customers' perspectives on counterfeits. Previous research informed the study. The analysis rests on luxury brands' relationship to the natural environment and the origin of natural resources. Cervellon (2013) suggested that luxury brands use natural resources such as gold, leather, linen, bamboo, cotton, and silk and confirmed that all glamorous luxury brands' originality comes from natural resources. Eswatini is an African country rich in natural resources. However, scholars asserted that natural resources' success impedes economic growth through the occurrence of subtle corruption, grabbing institutions, or the flawed rule of law (Epo & Faha, 2020). The ultimate obligation of

marketers and company managers is to comprehend and anticipate their customers' existing and impending requirements and desires and fulfill them accordingly (Oduro & Haylemariam, 2019).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature review consists of peer-reviewed literature. The researcher reviewed the academic literature on counterfeits in luxury brands in peer-reviewed journals, websites, dissertations, government reports, and scholarly books. The Google Scholar search engine linked to the Walden database yielded literature through Business Source Complete/Premier, EBSCO Primary, Academic Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Global, Psych ARTICLES, Emerald Management, ProQuest Central, Education Source, EBSCO Open Access Journals, Sage Premier Annual Reviews, Science Direct Subject Collections, and Science Direct. The key terms used in the research included luxury brands, counterfeit goods, strategies, customer relationships, consumption, behavior, authenticity, collaboration, and industry.

The published materials are from within the last five years with some earlier seminal studies necessary to clarify the theoretical framework. The literature review starts with an in-complexity argument of the conceptual framework guiding the proposed study. Table 1 outlines the literature reviewed in this study. The study contains 222 sources, all peer reviewed.

Table 1

*Literature Review Source Content*

Literature Review Content	Total Sources	Within 5 Years of Graduation Date of 2022	Percentage of Sources
Peer-reviewed journals	222	186	84%

**Resource-Based View Theory**

I chose the RBV theory developed by Barney (1991) was the conceptual framework chosen for the proposed study. The resource-based view (RBV) theory has four connected characteristics of what defines a luxury item: (a) valuable, (b) rare, (c) difficult to imitate, and (d) not substitutable. The tenets validate the use of luxury brands in Eswatini and provide an in-depth understanding of how these brands work in organizational settings. Wang et al. (2018) noted the need for strategic resource control to afford an organization the chance to develop advantages over its competitors. The RBV theory clarifies why some firms enjoy a competitive advantage and outperform others (Barney, 1991).

The most striking difference is that decision making can help firms implement external RBVs to influence the prior-current performance structure categorized as the practical framework (Chung et al., 2019). Explaining the theory's gap, Astuty et al. (2019) suggested that the RBV theory's process was unclear.

The theory emphasizes that organizations should have valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources but does not describe how to obtain or develop

them. Anibal et al. (2016) identified themes involving concentration and how they are related, clarified the RBV theory, and identified several disciplines helpful in understanding the nature and collection of resources, including strategic management, marketing, and human resources.

The initial focus, which supported a sustained competitive advantage, clarified the factors that provide a clear understanding of how organizations gain sustainable long-term competitive benefits (Barney, 1991). Astuty et al. (2019) asserted that the RBV theory could grant an organization long-term success in any business innovation based upon the internal resources of the firm offering it; long-term competitiveness can give profits and prosperity to an organization. Scholars discussed compelling facts clarifying counterfeits and luxury brands in business settings. Gurzki et al. (2019) initiated three sequential orders: (a) luxury brand advertising progressed in content because of more-complex movement patterns that make more-frequent use of symbolism, (b) linguistic structures, and (c) storytelling.

Different ideologies with RBV theory and its conclusions provide an exact version of Barney's ideas in RBV theory and distinctive competencies. Scholars have applied the RBV theory and suggested that, apart from traditional factors, there are other factors. Gurzki et al. (2019) discussed that managers applying RBV theory could establish that luxury brands are not substitutable, implying that advertising is crucial for luxury firms to confer meaning on their brands. Gurzki et al. (2019) discussed the components consistently and thoroughly across brands at a category level. The discussion exemplified visual rhetoric within the range of organizational innovation strategies.

Collaborative innovation to promote technological aggregation has become a standard strategy tool worldwide (Hwang, 2020). To avoid counterfeiters, luxury brand companies enhance communication strategies with formal communication codes. Luxury brand companies create these discourses by emphasizing transformational and cultural values (Gurzki et al., 2019).

### **Theory Elements**

The four tenets of RBV theory can help luxury brand managers understand the sustainable competitive advantage. Eswatini organizations connect different resources and collectibles identified as falling into the four categories of the RBV theory. RBV theory will give additional insights clarifying the tenets of the theory and the resources an organization may supply for progressing.

### ***Valuable***

Eswatini's art and collectibles form a broad category of luxury brands that promote the luxury brand industry. For example, Swazi Candles produces unique candles. Handcrafted products are popular natural products. Swazi Candles have no competition, showcasing their expertise in different designs and colorful variations sold on Amazon's U.S. website and in global markets. The scents and colors are unique to the brand, giving customers satisfaction and pride in possessing them. Swazi Candles's handcrafted products demonstrate the company's use of resources and capabilities to gain a competitive advantage over other firms.

***Rare***

Eswatini's natural resources turn out to be the basis for rare luxury brands. RBV theory holds that when resources are unique, competitors have difficulty reproducing them. Swazi Ngwenya Glass products are rare products, small abstract ornaments made from recycled glass and sold globally. Phiri (2020) suggested high adverse effects on the influence of exports on economic growth in Eswatini. For example, Ngwenya Glass products are different from other products and are rare and collectible. Some are available on Amazon. Resource economics links disciplines in the natural and social sciences to the broad areas of earth science, human economics, and natural ecosystems.

***Difficult to Imitate***

Authenticity gives luxury brands a distinct, credible feel that differentiates them from other brands. Boisvert and Ashill (2018) determined that luxury brand customers look for authenticity, purpose, and sustainability. This view led luxury brand organizations in Eswatini to ensure their products' authenticity. Examples include grass table mats and many other products made of grass. The importance of hay in Eswatini and its attendant indigenous grass knowledge have propelled the global market. The Swazi people embrace the socio-economic value of grass in their day-to-day living; this resource is difficult to imitate. Cervellon (2013) cited how brands that gain incredible revenues do so initially by exploiting natural resources and human artistry.

***Not Substitutable***

Resources are not substitutable; they are unique. Resources are utilized in the luxury brand category after proper production scrutiny and thorough manufacturing

expertise. Luxury brand originality arises from natural resources in emerging economies; Eswatini produces many natural resources. One of these is cotton, an agricultural product manufactured into clothing in the country's textile industry, which has many factories. Peng and Chen (2019) suggested branding a country's luxurious image to stimulate the tourism and hospitality industries. Eswatini business leaders work carefully to produce luxury brands from natural resources to communicate to the world that luxury brands originate from natural resources (Cervellon, 2013) such as the raw materials of silk, cotton, bamboo, linen, leather, and gold.

Developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Eswatini, contribute to global markets through their abundant natural resources. Although Eswatini is small and landlocked, its natural resources give it excellent economic standing on the world stage. Research has validated luxury brand purchases. The type of sales model and transaction costs can influence the degree of interaction between a sales agent and a client (Kanyangale & Lukhele, 2018). Different theories have formed about the purchase of luxury brands, and customers are at the center of the luxury brand industry because they play different roles. Zhang et al. (2021) suggested that cultural proximity plays various positions in the stages of customers' brand attitudes and behaviors.

### **Research that Used RBV**

A firm's resource-based view (RBV) symbolizes the most successful theoretical approach to strategic management in business realms. Building a competitive advantage successfully in an organization begins with four characteristics. Without these four characteristics, there will be no sustainable competitive organizations. The evolution of

RBV explains how strategic resources and competencies enable firms to succeed (Barney, 1991).

To realize a long-term competitive advantage based on the RVB concept, a firm should implement a soft innovation strategy (Astuty et al., 2019). Organizations should adopt strategies to help with progression. The current anti-counterfeit representative entails network expansion through talk shows, word-of-mouth, seminars, and many more networks. The communications are conducted directly and indirectly through various media. Outlets like television, radio, and the internet prove to be the recent breakthroughs for helping managers implement strategies to achieve their goals (Astuty et al., 2019). Under RBV, the firm's predictive power improved when resources were measured at an adequate level (Silverman, 1999) and matched with integration of principles from transaction cost economics into resource-based predictions concerning variation.

### **Supportive Theories**

Several theories related to RBV support the ethics of these organizations' operations. The behavioral ideas are arbitrator acceptability, luxury consumption, and ingratiation theory. Ethical leadership and the customer-relations leader-member exchange (LMX) theory support RBV. Ethical leadership and awareness of morality in society are good leadership skills (Halevy et al., 2020).

### **A Behavioral Theory of Arbitrator Acceptability**

The behavioral theory of arbitrator acceptability is helpful for organizations. Posthuma and Dworkin (2000) developed the behavioral theory of arbitrator acceptability. The key concepts are drawn from planned behavior theory, control theory,



organizational justice theories, and the decision-making literature and integrated into a single framework. Behavioral engagement is the most transparent way of displaying luxury brand knowledge (Jang et al., 2018). Researchers observed that three customer benefits are positively associated with marketing outcomes. Personal and social integrative services are the best predictors of engagement and purchase. Allowing employees to use their initiative and respond to inquiries can motivate them to do a better job and feel satisfied with their work (Ratcliffe, 2016). They can also provide integrative social services to younger and qualified customers.

Employees' positive behavioral engagement may lead to better interactions with customers and encourage them to talk positively about a brand. Research into shopping malls confirmed the direct effects of the overall service quality on loyalty. Cultures that score high on uncertainty avoidance try to minimize risk by adhering to strict laws and measures. Authors have discussed how learning is a pertinent cognitive and institutional pillar, but international managers have recommended understanding how the other institutions shape consumers' behaviors.

### **Luxury Consumption and Ingratiation Theory**

Ingratiation theorists challenged the theories that promoted the specific online brand communities, arguing that in-store experiences are crucial in promoting customer relations. Ingratiation theory by Leban and Voyer (2015) first defined the specificity of online luxury brand communities, using observational ethnography to analyze and discuss the diverging strategies held by low- and high-power community members. Roles improved through flattery to gain and maintain status in the community. Leban and

Voyer (2015) based their luxury consumption and ingratiation theory on Lindquist (1974), which suggested that luxury consumption is consequently traditionally linked with an exclusive in-store experience. Still, in the past decade, luxury brands have begun engaging in a two-way dialogue with customers, offering them opportunities to write reviews of sets or products on Facebook pages and campaigns.

Scholars argue that luxury consumption entails power and status. Amatulli and Guido (2011) investigated the effect of luxury brands. They posited that luxury consumption is a highly communicative act that signals status, wealth, social class, and economic power. Power and status obtained through notable consumption, such as public displays and luxury products, enhance social quality. Researchers discovered that Chinese executives and entrepreneurs are motivated to create luxury brands for profit. Their strong interest in luxury encourages a sense of pride in their corporations and country (Heine et al., 2019). There has been a global growth of luxury business start-ups fast-tracked since the 1990s along with the increase of the worldwide luxury market.

### **Luxury Consumption and Ingratiation Theory**

Understanding the values, backgrounds, and societal contexts of how customer relations are potentially affected by leadership in an organization is useful. Leaders are important as they influence how members define the purpose of the business and how they run the business for prosperity. Dansereau et al. (1975) coined the LMX theory. The theory is rooted in the idea that leaders and followers exchange benefits. The fundamental tenet of LMX theory is that leaders develop different quality relationships with their employees.

The LMX theory speaks to significant parts of the business—improved employee productivity, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and many related organizational outcomes. Scholars describe LMX based on the idea that the relationship between a supervisor and subordinates is unique and differs from others in quality (Mäkelä et al., 2021). The LMX theory helps explore the relationship between transformational leadership and employee voices and the role of relational identification and work engagement as mediators in this (Kim & Koo, 2017).

The essential tenet of a social exchange view of LMX theory is reciprocity. Followers have less freedom to avoid interchange when they do not feel helpful in relationships the way that leaders do (Gooty et al., 2019). Leader-member exchange theory and the topic of counterfeits differ from RBV because of leadership and reciprocity. The new theory's concept is of motivation, connecting leaders and employees to promote smooth operations. Research has demonstrated a difference between RBV and LMX in exploring emotions and emotional tone dynamics as they change over time (Gooty et al., 2019).

### **Contrasting Theory**

I chose one primary rival theory for RBV: value theory. Innovation is a significant driving force in corporate success and is a critical cause of risk, environment, and social turmoil. Innovation tendencies can also destroy an organization's competitive advantage through decisions about innovative activities (Ramon-Jeronimo et al., 2019). For example the blockchain can be used as follows:

## **Value Innovation**

The latest viewpoint is that the two types of innovations mutually contribute to firm performance. A new generation of research suggests that business model innovation could help firms create and capture value (Wang, et al., 2020). For example, if firms rely on technological innovation, superior performance and/or competitive advantage cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, organizations should examine the fit between business model innovation and technological innovation for outstanding firm performance (Wang et al., 2018). Wang et al. (2018) suggested that entrepreneurs invest in explorative instead of exploitative innovation to better transfer new value propositions into firm performance. The boost of digital innovation shortens the distance between firms and consumers such that consumer sovereignty is given unprecedented attention in the digital economy. Companies are to influence their leadership and management's strategic logic and consider injecting value innovation into the process regardless of the industry. Transformational leadership has a significantly positive influence on total quality management practices (Bouranta, 2021).

## **Recent Research**

Counterfeiting causes numerous economic losses and thus remains problematic in business. Counterfeiting is a significant and growing problem worldwide in developed and developing countries (Saeed & Paracha, 2019). Luxury brands are targets for counterfeits. Recent research has come from customers who sell luxury items, indicating a need to change their social roles. For some people, selling used luxury items heightens perceived social status. For others, it boosts their function as sustainable customers.

Turunen et al. (2020) discussed selling luxury brands via various proposals in which customers take new roles: besides being patrons and users, they occasionally become suppliers of luxury-branded products. First, the item's symbolic value: the perceived social function of the consumption of luxury brands preferred by customers in the marketplace turns out to be prioritized by customers (Shao et al., 2019).

Importers in most emerging countries are essential players in the global economy. There are many pitfalls and inconsistencies for developing economies exporting products. Counterfeits in natural resources trade still exact a high price in national views, international security, and power due to Eswatini's political and corruption sectors (Fafore & Adekoye, 2019). There is corruption: wherever business is concerned, watchdogs expect bribes (Osei-Assibey et al., 2017). Trust should prevail if organizations are to progress. Corrupt governments are widespread in developing economies. Several ideas on the measurement of crime have appeared in scholarly articles. Osei-Assibey et al. (2017) reported that the most corrupt region of the world is Africa. Sadaf et al. (2018) claimed that corruption and bribery reduce public confidence in the government and in the public trust.

Once trust between organizations has broken, the business cannot flourish. Developing economies are corrupt, and they legitimize tendencies toward corruption. Montes and Paschoal (2016) described several aspects of bribery: higher crime will increase the inflation rate, and rising corruption increases income disparity and poverty. Riti and Gubak (2020) suggested that the critical element for economic growth is political stability.

Dishonesty reduces government efficiency because officials and politicians embezzle resources from public services and infrastructure for private gain. The differences between the most and least corrupt nations are broad. Guha et al. (2020) expanded upon research showing that officials scramble to pocket as much money as possible for themselves and their families and friends, even at the cost of progress. People revealing corrupt governments receive threats. Riti and Gubak (2020) suggested that corruption can be an obstacle to economic growth. The money used for bribery could otherwise help governments progress.

Change is necessary for economies to advance, especially developing economies. Developing nations have the most corrupt governments and can utilize cash for progress rather than bribery. Changes in luxury consumption reveal the depth of change that the world has experienced. Warrick and Gardner (2021) suggested the need for leaders at all levels of an organization to be skilled at building cultures capable of achieving excellent results, bringing out the best in people, and offering specific advice on how to do so to effect positive change.

Cadle and Muller (2018) examined the problems and scandals in the financial world that have changed luxury consumption. The corruption trends have perpetuated counterfeits. Eswatini contributes natural resources plus both finished and unfinished luxury brand products to worldwide trade. The changed behaviors are the reason why luxury clients look for authenticity, purpose, and sustainability. Khanyile et al. (2019) reported that projects experiencing weak development and delivery were associated with poor communication management in Eswatini.

Luxury brand organizations are obligated to communicate about the best practices and strategies for curbing counterfeit products' exploitation. Corruption trends are different in developed economies. The main goals of developed countries are to reduce corruption to ensure better education and knowledge economy, educate the population, and train needed specialists to stimulate economic growth by optimizing government resources (Marwa & Chokri, 2020).

An investigation and synthesis of the counterfeit framework that connects management strategies and drives increased employee productivity through customer care. Also, it included a supporting theory from the literature on luxury brands. The luxury brands section addressed definitions, antecedents, processes, attitudes, and purchase intentions among counterfeit luxury brands (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017).

The discussion in this paper included how luxury brand counterfeiting can be deceptive or non-deceptive, depending on whether consumers are aware of a fake product. Kellermans et al. (2016) posited essential differences in how entrepreneurs view resources and how the RBV views them. For RBV to continue evolving within the entrepreneurship domain, it is necessary to study whether entrepreneurs need different resources to succeed.

Different ideas surface from various scholars regarding luxury brands and counterfeits. Eswatini contributes both natural resources and finished and unfinished luxury brand products to worldwide trade. Customers' changed behaviors are the reason why luxury clients look for authenticity, purpose, and sustainability. Khanyile et al. (2019) reported that projects experiencing weak development and delivery were

associated with poor communication management in Eswatini. Khanyile et al. (2019) suggested that luxury brand organizations are obligated to communicate about the best practices and strategies for curbing counterfeit products' exploitation. Kaur and Singh (2016) articulated the main reason why developing countries contribute business transactions: The success of a developing economy has become more dependent on the capacity to produce and use knowledge, which leads to the emergence of a knowledge economy (Kaur & Singh, 2016).

Developing economies must follow the example of developed economies to be successful in business. An investigation by Marticotte and Arcand (2017) connected management strategies and increased employee productivity through customer care. Also, it included a supporting theory from the literature on luxury brands (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017). The luxury brands section addressed definitions, antecedents, processes, attitudes, and purchase intentions among counterfeit luxury brands (Marticotte & Arcand, 2017). This discussion will expand on how luxury brand counterfeiting is illegal and harmful to brand preservation and awareness of luxury brand originality. Other theory developers connected RBV to customers' experiences buying luxury brands. Kellermans et al. (2016) posited essential differences in how entrepreneurs view resources and how RBV views them. For RBV to continue evolving within the entrepreneurship domain, it is necessary to study whether entrepreneurs need different resources to succeed.

The analysis rests on luxury brands' relationship to the natural environment and the origin of natural resources. Cervellon (2013) suggested that luxury brands use natural resources such as gold, leather, linen, bamboo, cotton, and silk and confirmed that all



glamorous luxury brands' originality comes from natural resources. Eswatini is an African country rich in natural resources. However, scholars assert that natural resources' success impedes economic growth through the occurrence of subtle corruption, grabbing institutions, or the flawed rule of law (Epo & Faha, 2020).

### **Analysis**

The ultimate obligation of marketers and company managers is to comprehend and anticipate their customers' existing and impending requirements and desires and fulfill them accordingly (Oduro & Haylemariam, 2019). Contrary to RBV theorists, competitiveness scholars have argued that comparative institutional advantages are an essential competitive advantage source. Organizations can gain competitiveness by increasing competitive gravity, exploiting established advantages, and following simplified strategies (Herrmann, 2008). Scholars have used RBV to explore relationships (Cavalcante dos Santos et al., 2019). RBV allows for identifying and grouping resources with firms that can create position barriers. By employing resources to position barriers, firms can stay ahead of the competition and consolidate their leadership in the market. The framework's strength is the unique nature of innovation resources for determining persistent superior performance (Cavalcante dos Santos et al., 2019) and demonstrating strength. Scholars have questioned the correlation between innovation and economic performance, as there is scarce tangible evidence in the literature.

The power of the connection between resources and competitive advantage depends on its competencies (Barney, 1991; Hart, 1995). Brands play a crucial role in the relationship between resources and competitive advantage. Customer evaluations of

brands become more favorable when brand-retailer co-brands make products available on a limited edition. It also helps determine how a brand may effectively approach a co-brand with a retailer (Childs & Jin, 2020). Fair purchasing decision-making processes avail positive outcomes with the approach and being mindful of the ethical perspective.

### **Generating Counterfeits Defined**

Sub-Saharan African countries have made significant strides in improving the regulation and governance of the financial sector. Even though no specific legislation could aim at the private security industry, any restriction in place works through labor law and business regulation (Berg & Howell, 2017). Managers have made luxury brand organizations flourish. Luxury brand organizations work with the government and follow the regulatory system to disseminate fair trade in global markets and boost the country's economy.

Communities also help by providing many services. For example, volunteers will work in nontoxic environments to contribute to the prosperity of luxury brand organizations. Improvements in efficiency, management, and market conduct have led to greater financial inclusion (Oduor & Kebba, 2019). Organizational cultures and government regulations ensure that production competently meets customers' requirements (Schulman, 2020). Luxury brand organizations always prioritize customers. The ability to differentiate between counterfeit and authentic products is crucial for prosperity. Zwane and Malale (2018) suggested that Eswatini has effectively circulated sound policies into mainstream education.

There are still barriers, such as a non-inclusive curriculum, lack of resources, high

numbers of students and teachers, and a lack of competence. Demortain (2017) discussed how other regulatory and scientific organizations influence society while making legally binding decisions about technologies, substances, and other products. They also elaborated on how evolution affects medicine, foods, chemical products, and biological innovation. Demortain (2017) also explained how to test, assess, and monitor technologies and their effects. Counterfeits are a hindrance to prosperity.

### **Training Managers Works with Counterfeits into Account**

Counterfeiting is a significant issue in business, and profitability is immensely affected by counterfeits. Training is an effective way of conducting business successfully; training and education create impracticable, risky, expensive, or intense stimulation (Koumaditis et al., 2020). Employees consider training an incentive: They refresh and develop ideas and keep employees in good spirits. Strong cultures emanate from leadership that prioritizes training, development, and education (Warrick & Gardner, 2021). Employees and customers are to collaborate and learn trends that can help evade counterfeits.

Counterfeits are a significant problem, both nationally and internationally. Managers must learn new strategies to curb the counterfeit problem in Eswatini (Fafore & Adekoye, 2019). Dlamini et al. (2018) explained how the global economic meltdown of 2010–12 forced Eswatini to refocus on education. Their study indicated that higher institutions are perceived as critical partners for restructuring educational institutions' cultures and curriculums to reflect national competencies. Varela et al. (2021) suggested that advertising and communication actions are necessary to make customers aware of

illegitimacy, appealing to them to avoid buying counterfeits since, without demand, the supply tends to decrease.

Training is an essential part of business success. A traditional conception is that luxury brands matter only in the national business field, but an increasing number of studies have shown that luxury brands cannot discount international business. There is a significant and positive impact on enterprise growth that emanates from different institutional and state support factors such as success in markets, education, and training access to finance, contract enforcement, regulations, and business support programs (Urban & Dlamini, 2020).

The responsible personnel in the Ministry of Education and Training commit to providing accessible, affordable, and relevant education of a high quality. All of this is because education is the foundation and central pillar of economic and social development when faithful to its core mandate. Motsa (2018) recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training consider evidence amending and incorporating specific inclusion guidelines in tertiary institutions in Eswatini's Education Sector policy. Eswatini has worked conscientiously to produce guidelines for corporate governance and codes of conduct for public enterprises. However, the lack of skilled personnel able to manage computerization has required some organizations to seek foreign staff members. Dlamini et al. (2018) suggested that it is necessary to professionally train all critical stakeholders on Eswatini-based education, particularly its application and purpose.

The idea of encouraging collaboration among international education organizations and consultants has encouraged competent and proficient professionals to

work on development. There are good training facilities in the Southern African Development Communities (SADC) region, where leaders always familiarize themselves with skilled labor. All efforts help Eswatini companies reach their intended threshold within a stipulated timeframe.

When employees are trained, customer-centricity is guaranteed. Eswatini must learn from developed countries how to make progress in technological advancements. Ruxwana and Msibi (2018) explained suitability and how helpful mobile devices are for convenience, conduciveness, and simplicity. Learning mobile technology has allowed university students to offer the country a suitable mobile learning platform.

Factors that contribute to readiness, such as adoption strategies, implementation plans, security and device management, skill development, and discipline, are measured using learning platforms. Reducing counterfeits needs the scrutiny of Eswatini's training trends to meet global market standards. Luxury brand marketing requires clear brand identities, product integrity, high prices, exclusive heritage, and supporting narratives (Bazi et al., 2020). Fyl and Luk'yanova (2020) suggested introducing proper, timely, and consecutive steps to ensure quality in the economy and to match developed countries' standards globally. In addition, Eswatini must implement measures to recover from the global economic crisis. These are necessary reform tasks in countries with less-developed democracies. Such actions are essential to reform charges in countries with less-developed democracies and low investment climate indexes.

## **Counterfeit Cotton Products**

Counterfeiters manipulate cotton products, a primary economy booster in Eswatini. Cotton becomes fabric through cotton ginnery, and many factories in Eswatini use it to make luxury brands for global markets. Environmental sustainability is the main challenge for cotton-related inventions in sub-Saharan Africa. The fifteen percent of global cotton lint exports originate from Sub-Saharan Africa (Partzsch & Kemper, 2019).

Cotton is one of the principal cash crops of sub-Saharan Africa. Eswatini produces cotton in abundance. African resources to European countries and African governments do not price their commodities; they agree with the trading partners' offer. Consumers do not alter their position in the trading system (Partzsch & Kemper, 2019). Sub-Saharan countries, including Eswatini, have no alternative but to agree to the suggested prices for their commodities because they need the money to sustain their developing economies.

Reducing counterfeits requires Eswatini's transportation sector to improve its transport system for ferrying authentic goods abroad. Eswatini is responsible for transporting goods to South Africa and Mozambique. There are seaports to global markets and the U.S. through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), strengthening commercial ties between the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa (Simo, 2018). An et al. (2019) suggested that brand credibility is positively related to brand self-connection and social connection, positively associated with favorable reputation.

The people of Eswatini, the U.S., and other countries will benefit from this study because they will have greater authentic, not counterfeit, luxury brands. Organizations

will improve communication through social media, and online videos will show customers how to relate to employees, maintain good relationships, and sustain social change. Transportation through neighboring countries can help Eswatini transport luxury brands to global markets.

The sustainability of products should be maintained all the time. Sustainability is a current concept in many academic disciplines and other arenas. Organizations also need to understand and assess fiscal sustainability to ensure financial and macro-economic stability (Nxumalo & Hlophe, 2018). Eswatini's Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy is a watchdog organization with the following values and guiding principles: integrity, innovation, professionalism, commitment, responsibility, accountability, and transparency. Eswatini's government indicated that it had a significant idea for controlling processes and introducing efficient means of developing innovative sustainability strategies to manage luxury brands appropriately. The concept involved economic growth, environmental quality, and social equity (Kurdve & de Goey, 2017).

Eswatini has a fragile economy, even among developing countries. As a result, the Swazi people face difficulties accessing necessities, and Eswatini needs to promote and harness favorable societal and institutional provisions (Motsa & Morojele, 2018). Athwal et al. (2019) discussed the global impact of the luxury industry and its interest in sustainability. They identified three essential themes: (1) consumer concerns and practices, (2) organizational problems and patterns, and (3) international and cross-cultural issues. These are crucial to luxury brands' sustainability, and managers can identify strategies to avoid counterfeits. Collaboration is also significant for conservation

of the organizational system to curb the influx of counterfeit products. Eswatini needs managers to connect their teams to new technologies to help luxury brand companies improve their organization and deliver products.

In an ideal collaboration, companies do not compete; instead, they work together for sustainability. For example, they collaborate to find strategies to maintain good production in different organizations. Commitment to successful business dealings is significant in luxury brand shows in the country. Eswatini's luxury brand organizations complement each other for the prosperity of their country. Eswatini's art and collectibles are difficult to duplicate. The RBV tenet that Barney (1991) developed and highlighted contains four other distinct resource-based declarations: when resources are rare, items like the Swazi candles become unique because the company is the only organization that profits from crafted candles.

### **Creating Counterfeit Culture Defined**

On a global spectrum, the damage caused by counterfeits is huge. Gök (2021) suggested that Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst-performing region compared to others since corruption is an epidemic inherited from colonial administrations. The figures measuring the damage caused by counterfeits are staggering, and that potential lost money is irreplaceable in a short timeframe. Fafore and Adekoye (2019) suggested that Eswatini played a prominent intersection between counterfeiting currency, drugs, and various markets with other Sub-Saharan countries. Other organizations—such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank (WB), and the Worldwide Governance Indicators Project (WGIP)—also provide indicators that may be



advantageous for examining stages of communal segment corruption (Mackey et al., 2015).

A focus on corporate policies and procedures that enhance an organization's competitive position helps eradicate existing counterfeit problems. Connecting the blockchain and other distributed ledger technologies (DLTs) guarantees the origin and traceability of data by affording a transparent, immutable, and verifiable record of transactions while creating a secure peer-to-peer platform for storing and exchanging information (Fernandez-Carames & Fraga-Lamas, 2020).

Managers in Eswatini cannot generate profits swiftly because of their approach, which is affected by their culture. Swazi managers of luxury brand organizations must aggressively implement strategies to curb the ongoing counterfeit problem affecting luxury brands globally; Daily (2001) explained that the non-confrontational Swazi culture provides insights into why the trading approach of Swazi luxury brands organizations is so appealing to trading partners. Even though they do not have pricing power, Swazi culture avoids confrontation and conflict, especially with some older people (Daily, 2001). Managers must match the global market's perspective and learn to differentiate between counterfeit and authentic products.

The assertion that Eswatini's culture affects business dealing is essential. Eswatini needs to join the global markets to change, and then development will show up in business arenas. A firm's sustainability is related to its assurance process (Hummel et al., 2019). Cultural associations should not affect business transactions if organizations are to succeed. Studies have indicated that consumers' internal ethical standards could reduce

fake purchases. Counterfeiters who achieve by selling their products exploit luxury brands to succeed in selling their products. They try to convince people that their products are authentic so that their business will flourish. Marticotte and Arcand (2017) mentioned the global impact of the luxury industry and its interest in sustainability. They collaborated with sustainable-luxury marketing and consumers to debate and set a future research agenda. Eswatini luxury brand organizations must help customers connect with global markets and identify authentic luxury brands.

Luxury brands possess desirability beyond their functionality, and ownership of them provides an appearance of status. They have a remarkable impact on consumers' minds, and counterfeits that offer these same features are becoming increasingly important. Pasricha et al. (2019) discussed how people generally purchase luxury goods for value, prestige, and status because they are expensive. Leaders are always on the front line of implementing strategies to eradicate the counterfeit problem that disables Eswatini's luxury brands, and some of these strategies require understanding the factors that could lead consumers to purchase counterfeit products. Varela et al. (2021) indicated that the most purchased counterfeit products are in line with the luxury brand products most sought (clothing, footwear, and bags), and the common denominator is the price. Luxury brands are popular with customers because of uniqueness, exclusivity, and status conferred upon those who buy them. Luxury brand organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa do not compete with other companies; they work jointly. People are motivated to act in ways consistent with their values because it signals their social acceptance and strengthens their self-esteem (Warrick & Gardner, 2021).

Natural resource extraction typically involves foreign-owned firms, capital, and skilled personnel. Many developing countries rely on exports of their natural resources to provide economic growth and significant contribution to national income (Gedikli, 2020). Although individual efforts are made to search for fake goods manufacturers and prevent their activities, the situation has not improved; it has even deteriorated in Eswatini. Trang and Muhammad (2016) discussed how luxury fashion brands compete with not only other luxury fashion brands but also manufacturers of counterfeits. They accentuated the necessity of understanding customers' opinions about counterfeits. They aimed to understand better and become more conversant about the counterfeit luxury brand market in the U.K. and identify the key factors that customers believe have the most excellent bearing on purchasing fake luxury fashion brands.

### **Balancing Social Media Interest over Counterfeits**

Counterfeits are becoming a barrier to the success of luxury brands. Business leaders use luxury brands to develop new markets or acquire technology and innovation to optimize globalization. Social media plays a pivotal dual role in this exertion, first as a mouthpiece for firms to promote their brands, and secondly, as a medium for counterfeiters to manipulate luxury brands. The increase in indispensable resources for customers' decisions creates a brand-customer relationship (Pentina et al., 2018). The Ngwenya Glass Factory @ is tourist attraction centre created a customer relationship because customers visit the place constantly.

Many shoppers benefit from online shopping and manipulate it to buy counterfeit products. However, online shoppers cannot interact with a person and cannot enjoy the

in-store environment; they cannot touch or try the product online (Beck & Crie, 2016). As a result, in-store shoppers benefit from the experience and can easily evade counterfeits. The lack of physical interaction with a product is a significant setback in online purchasing, and it denies shoppers the advantage of the feel of a product before purchasing it.

Organizations maintain that the development and maintenance of customer-brand relationships will produce good outcomes over time. Establishments have inadequate control over information dissemination (Pantano, 2021). The distribution of information across social media creates a point of discussion in many contexts. Pentina et al. (2018) posited that allowing single-consumer input into brand-related discourse can enhance customer relationships. Offering a precise positioning based on exclusivity, heritage, uniqueness, and association with high society validates the connection between brand and customer.

On the other hand, harmful use of social media by counterfeiters exists to manipulate the authenticity of luxury brands. Whereas luxury brand organizations use social media platforms to advance innovation, counterfeiters use social media to control luxury brands. Research into social media marketing by luxury brands has reported that luxury appeals to people despite the contradiction between exclusivity and uniqueness. Because social media platforms advertise status and accessibility to the broad masses worldwide, social media marketing efforts improve brand awareness and enhance customer trust in and intimacy with the brand.

The impact of the internet on society is huge. Howe et al. (2020) suggested that

the internet can cause individuals and organizations to fear rapid technology changes. However, virtual work has become a necessity for the organizational persistence of many businesses. As a result of virtual working experiences, organizations are shifting and refining training regarding specific technology, particularly how to use it effectively and intuitively (Howe et al., 2020). Although several attempts have been made to address luxury brands in research about internet patterns, the behaviors of luxury brands on the internet have not been exhaustively identified, characterized, or classified in a discussion of brand fairness. Pentina et al. (2018) found that brand followers describe the distinctive nature by higher brand trust, greater brand identification, a more substantial commitment to their Twitter communities, and higher intentions to continue with these marks of participation. Twitter participation was more likely to lead to people retweeting brand messages. Studies of online brand communities have proposed brand evangelism: defending and reinforcing a brand to gain social recognition from other community members.

Interaction from an organization to a consumer intensifies consumer creativity in producing brand-related content and amateur advertisement. Eswatini's luxury brand organizations must take a comprehensive approach to develop a multicultural ideology to benefit from their diverse employees (Fitzsimmons, 2013). The primary focus for distinguishing luxury brand communication factors is advertising.

The effective use of technology can help firms promote technological convergence. Wang et al. (2020) described technological convergence as a combination of technologies to solve a technical problem. For example, in the luxury brand industry,

advertisement technology plays a pivotal role in sales promotion. Luxury brand organizations in Eswatini depend on advertising their products and protecting their products from counterfeits. Advertising is a protective tool that helps an organization alleviate the problem of counterfeits.

When organizations in Eswatini advertise their products, it is a protective move that gives customers a clear picture of their authenticity and originality. The use of technology in luxury brand manufacturing denotes a higher return on investment. For example, blockchain technology, helpful in so many industries, also has applications for the authentication of diamonds and their certification (Tsan-Ming, 2019).

Luxury brands follow logic rooted in their sociological appearances, which are different from those of mass-market brands. The expensive nature of luxury brands is the reason why counterfeiters manipulate those companies. The success of luxury brands comes from how they shape status in service encounters (Dion & Borraz, 2017). Swazi organizations should be mindful of the use of technology to manipulate luxury brands. Organizations should find strategies to avoid counterfeit luxury brands.

In shopping malls, research has focused mainly on the direct effects of overall service quality on loyalty. Luxury brand companies work tirelessly to protect their brands from counterfeit exploitation. The customer demand for obtaining fake luxury brands has increased significantly (Pasricha et al., 2019). Luxury goods provide a durable sense of prestige for the person who owns the items. Also, the items are differentiated from more-common items by their exclusiveness, quality, inimitability, and self-expression. Diallo et al. (2018) posited a unique perception of direct and indirect relationships between service

excellence and specific dimensions of alleged value, client satisfaction, and trustworthiness.

Cultures that score high on uncertainty avoidance attempt to minimize risk by adhering to strict laws and measures (Diallo et al., 2018). Learning is a highly appropriate tool for reasoning and thus is an institutional pillar (Diallo et al., 2018). International managers must understand how other institutional components shape consumer behaviors. For example, it is essential to positively connect on-brand behavior with luxury brands to achieve their goals. Eswatini has extensive coal, diamonds, quarry stone, timber, and glass to recycle to preserve the environment. Scrutiny of brand personalities helps luxury brands progress at national and international levels, and thus Eswatini organizations should be mindful of luxury brand personalities. Massara et al. (2020) posited that brands connect to customers more personally by stressing their nature and acting like friends. Combining these perspectives on brand personality makes it possible to connect with luxury brands to achieve their goals. Company goals should include identifying strategies used to combat counterfeit products.

### **Understanding Counterfeit Problems**

Counterfeiting continues to be problematic due to corruption in Eswatini. Eswatini is ranked low in competitiveness because of various forms of crime; crime is a persistent problem and brings significant negative consequences to the economy and society (Hope, 2016). Methods of self-reporting, field research, and experiments to understand beliefs, morals, and values across cultures are desirable (Lynn et al., 2020). Failure to follow such trends will lead to Eswatini's failure to address corruption in the

luxury brand trade. Combating corruption is Eswatini's most critical task in governance (Hope, 2016). The significance of luxury brands for driving production in Eswatini's manufacturing industry must receive the necessary attention. One important use of luxury brands is as exports to developed countries in exchange for profitable returns. Consequently, there is value in improving luxury brand operations and maintaining authenticity.

### **Reducing Counterfeits is Important**

Eswatini luxury brands may benefit from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), protecting Swazi trade. AGOA is a United States law enacted on May 18, 2000, as Public Law 106 of the 200th Congress and now renewed to 2025 (Simo, 2018). The legislation considerably increases market access to the U.S. for qualifying Sub-Saharan African countries. Companies with a lower risk appetite level are more proactive and have a broad number of mitigation capabilities. Such companies develop intelligence that requires combating counterfeiting and the abilities necessary for addressing its ex-ante and ex-post phases.

In addition, these companies build intelligence that may require combating counterfeiting and the capabilities needed for development (Solange et al., 2018). Regardless of the efforts to combat counterfeits, medicine can contain incorrect ingredients and doses or show no active ingredients if falsified. This situation means that millions of patients are unaware that they are taking medications that fail to work as prescribed: a detrimental problem and a health hazard to all (Saxena et al., 2020).



Even though researchers confirm the attributes of RBV, it is vital to connect the principles with the present influx of natural resources to Eswatini. Drawing on ideas from RBV, this study views a firm as a collection of resources. The objective is to examine whether and how joining firms' resource bases can play a role in creating value (Wang et al., 2018). The cross-border acquisition has proved to be a crucial strategic tool involving trillions of U.S. dollars yearly and affecting the domestic and global economies. Cross-border investment connects with value creation in business avenues. The essential lesson of RBV is that resources and competencies come in bundles; it is necessary to decide how these bundles form and change and manage various combinations. At this level, Eswatini's luxury brand organizations need to be active in all their dealings. Their goal should be to generate and show revenue that exceeds costs. Changes in business conduct should accommodate successful business transactions all the time.

Eswatini's luxury brand business managers need to generate profits and cannot afford to deliver undesirable service. RBV tenets connect with competitive aspects of organizations that stretch their development ideologies. The approach has been influential across management fields, and it is about using resources strategically for competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Doing this requires a continuous effort to improve service. Avoiding counterfeits is a priority to succeed in the luxury brand industry.

The luxury brand industry is highly competitive, and organizations value profits immensely. In protecting the luxury brand approach, firms should distribute information about their activities that verify that they are consistent with sustainability goals. Luxury brand managers must strive to offer excellent service and achieve customer retention

(Chaurasia et al., 2017). The central components of customer relationship management (CRM) are customer acquisition and retention and are critical drivers of a firm's long-term profit (You & Joshi, 2020).

The present study recognizes that firms' resource centers play a role in creating value by collecting resources. The attributes of corporate strategic resources affect product and process innovation patterns (Cho & Linderman, 2020).

### **Incorporate Technology and Counterfeits**

Counterfeiters benefit from technology by manipulating authentic brands. Technological advancements have brought a lot of nervousness, despair, and even suicides due to increased unemployment; hence the fundamental purpose of technology is to cope with technological advances. Scholars suggest that substantial technology users are twice as likely as light users to be depressed or have low well-being (Poudyal et al., 2019). Productive efficiency requires that all firms operate using the best technical and managerial processes. In the luxury brand space, counterfeits can be detected using technology (Toyoda et al., 2016). Buttice et al. (2020) suggested that counterfeiting is negatively associated with the affected companies' operative margins. Toyoda et al. (2016) mentioned blockchain technology counterfeit-detecting software. Blockchain technology is a new trend, and scientists are exploring this new research area in the business realm (Qaiser et al., 2020).

Businesses use technology and train staff to improve their competitive business advantage. Yu et al. (2017) suggested that luxury brands' positive effects always guarantee a closer relationship with consumers. Various private sectors are already using

blockchain to combat counterfeits. Even though the technology is under development, it is a current tool to combat counterfeits (Momo et al., 2019). Luxury brand organizations should also adapt their marketing strategies to regional markets. Solomon and Klyton (2020) suggested individual rather than corporate or management usage of digital technology. The personal approach to digital technology significantly influences commercial development in African countries. Alternatively, some scholars have suggested that change is inevitable in organizations when technology is involved, and connections are always necessary for progress in an organizational setting.

Change challenges teams in organizations; innovation and revolution always bring change. Oreg (2018) mentioned four dimensions of change: (1) Routine seeking is when employees have a comfort zone in their daily routine, (2) an emotional reaction is when employees are not accepting change and possibly are depressed about it, (3) a short-term focus is when individuals do not think outside the box but consider short-term rather than long-term effects, and (4) cognitive rigidity is when individuals do not adjust to change. Scholars describe how ideology stems from innovative behaviors. De Montreuil Carmona and Gomes (2021) clarified that organizational changes result from creative conduct and promote and increase competitiveness to transform strategy, technology, and work systems.

Competitiveness is a vital component of all business. Competitiveness is leveraging the capacity of people, organizations, and nations to achieve high production and product value using exact input amounts (De Montreuil Carmona & Gomes, 2021). Also, management styles can become a source of sustainable strategic competitive

advantage. One remarkable difference in firms that do not revisit their strategic plans is that there are no transformations in their strategies, and progress is impossible. Yoon (2020) suggested that regardless of effort, African countries have failed to gain the economic prosperity associated with digitalization because of a persistent digital division, including digital skill deficiencies.

Providers negotiate with carriers that provide transportation from their facilities to move cargo through security. Scholars applying RBV and discussing gaps in trust using knowledge (Saleh & Bianchi, 2020) revealed that cultural similarities with importers positively affected exporters' expertise. Also, experience and improvements in small- and medium-sized enterprises' SME importer relationships are crucial in organizations. Scholars suggest that governments must direct the inconsistent objectives that arise across the different stages of an implementation process, modifying implementation approaches to reduce the likelihood of unwanted implementation effects (Saleh & Bianchi, 2020).

Exercising forethought capacity and insightful capacity are necessary but not sufficient to realize long-term policy goals. The SME are also concerned with recognized problems that developing countries face, which can improve with the right approach and adequate authentic luxury brand resources. The crucial part is that management must take the right path for luxury brand organizations to improve marketing globally. Organizations should maintain transparency of the factory to the seaports when product trade extends to international markets. Advocating transparency entails proper steps of business change. Implementing change requires a diplomatic approach. Carcary (2020)

suggested that competency-based training can be a training solution response to the dynamic competitive conditions and align with competency requirements.

### **History of Eswatini**

Eswatini, formerly Swaziland, is one of the natural resource producers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Eswatini recently changed the country's name from Swaziland to Eswatini (Dlamini, 2019). Eswatini is a landlocked country in Sub-Saharan Africa of 17,000 km<sup>2</sup> and around 1.3 million people (Dlamini, 2019). The government is constantly experiencing unnecessary delays when exporting luxury brands overseas to sustain its global trade. Bonfatti and Poelhekke (2017) discussed a range of standard trade costs in Africa between coastal and landlocked destinations.

Eswatini's proximity to international markets depends on the nearest African countries: ports are accessible only through South Africa and Mozambique's neighboring countries. The seaport countries demand tariffs from Eswatini to export goods through them. Bonfatti and Poelhekke (2017) suggested that the government of Eswatini lower its trade costs with its neighbors through infrastructure building. Natural resource extraction companies must innovate and develop sustainable and environmentally friendly techniques for surviving economic pitfalls.

Managers must implement the best strategies for success, regardless of extreme events. This idea originated with climate creation. The managers of luxury brand organizations must know the strategies that can help their organizations avoid counterfeiting. Simelane (2008) suggested that private security in Eswatini has drawn slim attention in scholarly debates. The chief economically beneficial minerals in

Eswatini include silica, gold, diamond, kaolin, and coal. Others like tin, copper, arsenic, manganese, and nickel are available but rarely mined due to their low quality and small deposits (Phiri, 2020). The use of new technologies requires equipment that is not usually considered a hazard but may be a significant source of undesirable emissions (Boitan et al., 2020).

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 discussed the background of the problem and included the problem statement, purpose statement, and the research question that will guide this study. There are six interview questions for this research project. Answers to the research questions could be significant to business practice and guide successful strategies that Eswatini organizations' leaders may use to avoid counterfeits in their brands. RBV is the conceptual framework for this study. Section 2 will report the (a) role of the researcher, (b) qualitative research method, (c) case study method, (d) population and sampling, (e) ethical research, (f) reliability and validity, (g) data collection, (h) data organization technique, and (i) data analysis. Section 3 will (a) present the research findings, (b) discuss the findings in application to professional practice, (c) list implications for social change, (d) offer recommendations for action, (e) propose recommendations for further research, (f) provide reflections, and (g) close with a conclusion.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 will elaborate upon the purpose statement, discuss the role of the researcher, and briefly discuss the participants. Finally, it will discuss the research method and design's populations and sampling.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the proposed qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that luxury brand managers use to deal with the influence of counterfeit products on their brands. The study will focus on Eswatini luxury products locally manufactured and handcrafted from Swazi indigenous raw materials. These luxury products contain natural resources like copper, animal skins, cotton, silk, bamboo, linen, leather, and gold (Cervellon, 2013). Luxury goods are also supposed to exploit natural resources that are rare and not necessarily renewable (Cervellon, 2013). Luxury brands have qualities that distinguish them from other non-luxury brands (Romaniuk & Huang, 2020). The targeted population for this study is managers from nine luxury brand manufacturing organizations and handicraft centers in Eswatini, Sub-Saharan Africa. Managers in manufacturing organizations know that their first-hand knowledge about their products might help forces loyal in sharing information. This proposed research might enable managers of luxury brands to learn how to avoid counterfeits of their brands. The research results may effect positive social change; they might help local businesses increase employment in the local communities, improving their quality of life.

### **Role of Researcher**

The qualitative researcher serves in an iterative process that enhances understanding of the scientific community. Also, the qualitative researcher can identify new significant discrepancies resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In this study, the researcher was a primary tool to improve research designs while collecting information using the semi-structured interview to collect data from participants. The researcher conducted data analysis and reviewed company documents such as manuals and published annual reports to triangulate evidence from collected data. The researcher presented findings, recommended future research, and discussed the gap in the research findings. Ethics was pivotal and a priority throughout the data collection processes, and the research aligned with the requirements of the Belmont Report (Adashi et al., 2018).

The researcher's role related to ethics and the Belmont Report 29 protocol require that researchers must respect persons by incorporating two ethical convictions: first, that individuals should receive treatment as autonomous agents; second, that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection. Also, as beneficence, persons are treated ethically by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm, making efforts to secure their wellbeing. Lester and Anders (2018) suggested that qualitative researchers might engage with the ethics of representation and address the tension between the desire to know and the limits. Lastly, the researcher adhered to obligations to transparency, dependability, and advocacy, being mindful of issues of responsibility and representation.



The researcher is an online shopper and occasionally purchases counterfeits unintentionally. The experience of purchasing counterfeits is widespread and disheartening to customers who buy counterfeits unintentionally. The researcher can mitigate bias by remaining aware of personal experiences. Luxury brands target counterfeits because of their fundamental value (Boisvert & Ashill, 2018) as expensive and because not every customer can afford luxury brands. Randhawa et al. (2015) suggested that counterfeits provide prestige without paying a high price. Evans et al. (2019) indicated that considering the brand more broadly than its legal personification creates an opportunity to develop initiative-taking protection against counterfeiting.

Counterfeiters are in the advantageous position to spend less money to coerce customers to purchase their counterfeits. Saunders et al. (2015) clarified how internet-mediated methods are subject to issues that affect traditional ways of gaining research access. The rationale for an interview protocol entails consideration of the qualitative researcher as a primary research instrument for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data.

### **Participants**

Choosing participants is a critical portion of researching non-substitutable aspects of a study. Participants must know the topic to provide rich data for the study (Yin, 2018). The target population for this study consists of nine leaders from three to four organizations who have been in operation for over two decades in the Eswatini area of Sub-Saharan Africa and have successfully implemented counterfeit strategies while enhancing corporate luxury brands' authenticity. The participant criteria are as follows:

- Leaders participate responsibly in implanting the anti-counterfeit mandate in the luxury brand industry.
- Leaders are full-time employees of the organization.
- Leaders have successfully implemented anti-counterfeiting as part of the organizational strategy.
- Leaders work for an organization located in Eswatini Sub-Saharan Africa,

possess a minimum of two years of leadership experience in the administrative services sector, and can incorporate the view of one or two leaders per organization, at different leadership levels, such as organizational managing executives and managers.

The intention was to gain in-depth insights collected based on the roles of those participants. The researcher avoided the risk of selecting participants without a rationale for the participant selection. During brief interviews and a questionnaire, all study participants specified their preferences and justified their choices (Zhou & Parmanto, 2020). The researcher engaged with participants, allowing them to specify their preferences for interview day, time, and location. The researcher could move forward with the study knowing that participants had been chosen based on impartial evidence (Rook, 2018).

### **Research Method**

There are three research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Yin, 2018). Researchers using a qualitative method try to find, understand, and explore how and why a phenomenon exists (Yin, 2018). On the other hand, quantitative researchers use numerical or quantified data (Saunders et al., 2015). The researcher did

not use quantified data for this study. Therefore, the quantitative method was not suitable for this study. The researcher selected the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews and participatory observation.

Quantitative researchers try to understand the original reasons, impetuses, and thoughts about the phenomenon under investigation. A mixed-method approach may bring out the best in both methods and offer the competence to answer more than one type of research question (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Qualitative research is advantageous for a study when the researcher desires to add flexibility and have direct contact with the study population (Farah, 2017).

The valuable part of the study was the direct contact with the people to understand the phenomenon. The interview questions were open-ended. Oberemko (2018) described an open-ended question that allows the researcher to explore participants' ideas and deeply explain any general presuppositions for classifying answers to open-ended questions. The qualitative research method is optimal for understanding how luxury brand leaders use anti-counterfeit strategies to enhance their authenticity.

### **Research Design**

The researcher selected the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews and participatory observation, choosing the multiple case study design for this study. Using a multiple case study, a researcher can collect precise data without ambiguity (Yin, 2018). The researcher intended to collect rich and untarnished data to get the best results. In ethnography design, the researcher becomes absorbed in the participants' daily lives to observe their behaviours then understand the culture or societal group and systems (Yin,

2018). The phenomenological design was unsuitable because it requires a long observation and focuses on participants' lived experiences.

The ethnography design was not appropriate because the participants' lifetimes and family practices were not the focus of the proposed study. The researcher intended to explore multiple cases to develop a deep understanding but did not plan to explore any individual's lived experiences. Hans-gerd (2017) posited that a researcher might favor a case study design paralleled to the other research designs because case study research investigates a real-life phenomenon in depth and within its environmental setting. An example of a complex marketing phenomenon might be customer and oriented knowledge. Ethnography shows the kinds of results an anticipated conceptual development might yield. A phenomenological design was inappropriate for this research study, as the researcher did not intend to explore the personal meanings of participants' lived experiences.

The researcher gained in-depth and robust evidence of similarities and differences among counterfeit strategies; a multiple case study design was appropriate to address the proposed study's research question. Researchers achieve data saturation when there is no new substantive information and insights from the research participants (Yang et al., 2019). If there was no achievement of data saturation after the initial interviews, the researcher expanded the sample until no new themes emerged from the interview responses.

### **Population and Sampling**

In research, the focus on target expression and ethnicity and the participant's majority or minority status plays a role in findings of openness such as trustworthiness, friendliness, and threat (Trent & Ferguson, 2021). Knowing the research objectives and the participant's knowledge of the research topic is crucial. Initial decisions regarding the sampling approach in qualitative research should guide a study's research questions and conceptual framework (Farrugia, 2019).

The sampling decisions can aid in focusing the research and establishing crucial depictions. The general aim of sampling in qualitative research is to plan the sampling approach, a vital stage of qualitative research and an essential factor for determining whether a study can successfully and efficiently answer a research question (Farrugia, 2019). Deciding on suitable sample size is pivotal in qualitative research. The confidence necessary in the data should help determine an investigation's outcome and the level of certainty that the characteristics of the data collected will represent the target population's characteristics. It should also include the type of analysis to undertake (Saunders et al., 2015).

Sampling adds depth and richness to an analysis by exploring various aspects of a case and multiple forms of evidence; researchers may sample numerous instances to increase the confidence in study findings through replication (Farrugia, 2019). The suitable sample size depends on what the researcher aims to attain and shows that the data collected has sufficient depth to stipulate significance good enough to answer the research question. The level of certainty that the characteristics of the data collected will

represent the target population's characteristics. It should also include the type of analysis the researcher will undertake (Saunders et al., 2015).

The researcher for this study used consumption processes to produce rich data. Consumption refers to going back to similar movies and books for seconds, thirds, or thirtieths (Cervellon & Brown, 2018). Consumption is evident in a collective context; the concept applies to outcomes, not just re-skilled originals; it holds well when phenomenological research methods are employed, and nostalgia is its driving force (Cervellon & Brown, 2018). The target sample for this proposed study consists of nine leaders from nine organizations that have been in operation for over two decades in Eswatini, Sub-Saharan Africa. These organizations have successfully implemented anticounterfeit strategies in their organizations. The researcher chose the judgment sampling technique to select potential participants.

Judgment sampling is a frequently applied conceptually driven approach. The researcher deliberately and purposefully selects the sample believed to be the most fruitful in answering the research question (Farrugia, 2019). The description varies per scholar. Alam (2021) described data saturation as attaining the researcher's ultimate data collection point without adding anything to the databank. Qualitative researchers reach data saturation when the participants' evidence offers enough information to provide depth and address the research. The target population for this study consists of nine leaders from nine luxury brand organizations in Eswatini Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical considerations are a vital component of research as a primary tool for the study. The researcher ensured that research findings-maintained validity and reliability. Hoolachan (2016) stated that building trust and rapport with research participants is essential to feel comfortable enough that the participants would invite the researcher into their social worlds. That exertion requires a lot of time and effort because it demonstrates the research style's reliability and whether the study will have research merit.

Additionally, a researcher should ask whether the survey has measured the critical concepts in the study (Heale & Twycross, 2015) and must take all the necessary precautions and steps to conduct research ethically. To maintain ethical research, this study followed ethical guidelines throughout the research process to avoid risks to participants that might otherwise be hazarded. Researchers must provide insights into the development of ethical procedures in collecting data all the time for success (Michaelidou et al., 2021). Laas et al. (2021) also explained how often ethical issues arise in the daily practice of research.

The researcher used Eswatini's Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy to look up organizations that publicly publish their annual and integrated reports on their websites. The statements included information about the CEOs and business leaders responsible for counterfeits and innovation expansions. The researcher sourced some specific contact information using the annual integrated reports for each organization.

Zoom and Skype are web-based video-conferencing tools that help online meetings with participants, and it has gained popularity during the coronavirus

lockdowns (Marks, 2020). For conducting the interviews, the researcher used Zoom or Skype. During the Zoom or Skype appointment, the researcher held detailed discussions with participants to formalize the research process and secured intent to participate via email before participation. The researcher was open and honest when responding to the questions and concerns of the participants for transparency.

Unethical behavior should not distract the study. Customer expectations are crucial to businesses, and organizational awareness is essential for connecting with customers in an excellent way to meet their expectations. Nunan (2021) clarified the issues around privacy and ethics that remain crucial on top of existing issues around confidentiality and new ethical challenges. The growth of online misinformation and the resulting impact on trust in data underscore why ethics are at the center of research. They further clarify the theme related to the role of data collection in research. The research process must mitigate any risks to participants associated with the research process. The informed consent form outlines the IRB requirements to abide by the ethical standards in research and fulfill the Belmont Report (Adashi et al., 2018).

Professional association ethical codes should be a starting point of moral behavior if organizations succeed. The IRB requirements are explicit about approval conditions. Resnik (2020) argued that an IRB should approve a study only if it has clear and considerable evidence that the research meets all the approval principles and other relevant ethical contemplations. The informed consent form outlines the IRB requirements to comply with ethical standards. Before beginning the research discussions, the researcher asked all participants to indicate their consent. The consent



form's objective is to ensure that participants understand the purpose of the study. The researcher made sure to note that the final doctoral manuscript includes the Walden IRB approval number and does not leak any privacy and/or other identifiable information about individuals or organizations for confidentiality.

Customers have mixed feelings about artificial intelligence (AI) because it is widespread in today's marketplace due to the numerous ethical challenges associated with the development and deployment of AI. Critical ethical issues identified regarding AI include any researcher biases, ethical design, consumer privacy, cybersecurity, individual autonomy and wellbeing, and unemployment (Du & Xie, 2020). Since ethics are at the center of research and guide the study (Du & Xie, 2020), companies need to engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) to shape the future of ethical AI (Du & Xie, 2020). Regardless of challenges that become more serious as AI becomes more powerful, researchers should prioritize ethics for success. The researcher took all the necessary precautions and steps to conduct the research ethically and followed ethical guidelines throughout the research process to alleviate any risks to participants associated with the research process. The informed consent form summarizes the IRB requirements to abide by the ethical morals in research and the serenity of the Belmont Report (Adashi et al., 2018). Any informed consent form be simple without misleading participants (Simonds et al., 2017). The focus should be on reassuring participants that the researchers and institutions will respect them. Participants should also be able to withdraw their involvement anytime they wish to do so. Holm and Ploug (2017) suggested that

participants have the right to withdraw their participation in the study, regardless of the initial consent provided and without negative recourse.

Participants who choose to withdraw from this study may do so by sending an email notifying the researcher of their intention to withdraw from the study. Information obtained from the participants who choose to withdraw from the research study will not be part of the research findings. The researcher destroyed any physically collected information and erased content from the audio recordings of the participants who chose to withdraw from the research study. The researcher emailed a summary of the findings to the participants who completed the interviews following the study's publication.

Incentives are unacceptable in research. Schultz and Hendricks (2018) posited that researchers must carefully consider using incentives and generally should not use incentives to influence the decision to participate in a study. Participation in this research study was voluntary with no participation incentives. Acklin (2020) argued that professional activities, including indirect personality assessment, voluntariness, informed consent, no stipulated harms, and ethical accountability, should be inclusive. Psychology practice in these contexts is not and should not be considered moral. Participants must be always protected during research. Mahdavi et al. (2020) suggested that safeguarding participants will ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality. Safekeeping and creating special identification codes minimized the risk of an unauthorized person's use because it ensured the confidentiality of the participants. Identification codes such as B1, B2, B3, etc. were a blind signature scheme to protect participants. Yang et al. (2019)

described a blind signature scheme as a basic cryptanalytic primitive to guarantee the anonymity of participants. A blind signature scheme consists of two entities: a message sender and a signer. It allowed the sender to obtain the signature of a given message without revealing any information about the announcement and the corresponding signature.

I stored research information on her personal computer, an external hard drive, and the cloud, accessible only through password use and private data for service only. Cloud storage was an alternative precaution in case the computer was destroyed or stolen. In addition, the researcher used a locked cabinet in her home office to safely store documentation for the research. After 5 years of publication of the study, the researcher will shred all papers. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study is 02-23-22-0670688. It expires on February 22, 2023.

Before beginning the research interviews, I requested all participants to indicate their consent. The consent form objective was to ensure that participants understood the purpose of the study, procedures, related risks, and benefits, how the researcher protected their privacy, and their right to retract from the study at any time should they wish to do so. Schultz and Hendricks (2018) suggested that the researcher is obligated to respect the rights of participants by allowing them the freedom to withdraw at any stage of the research study; ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and fair treatment; and protect the participants from any harm and discomfort throughout the research study.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy in Eswatini helped supply information on choosing appropriate organizations that produced rich data. After IRB

approval, I started communications. The selection of the participants was one of the factors that enabled the delivery of an optimal study outcome. The Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy in Eswatini enabled me to identify the companies that helped with data for the study. After the IRB's approval, I started communicating with the relevant offices. I remembered a few organizations that are private companies such as Ngwenya Glass Company Ngwenya Glass, Mantenga Craft Center, and Swazi Candles.

Financial inclusion, particularly for small-scale businesses, plays a pivotal role in business governance. The country of origin must have adequate financial stability to meet the demands of tariffs. Financial inclusion can be described as entrepreneurs' access to financial products and services to satisfy their clients' needs (Hattingh et al., 2020). Ethical studies of luxury consumption should recognize uncertainty about its specific qualities. Customers are enthusiastic about authenticity in market offerings. There are various motives for the consumption of counterfeits, particularly pricing, which is always less than for authentic brands. Counterfeiters manipulate luxury brands because the price tag is always less than authentic brands, attracting customers. Ngwenya and Hassan (2005) mentioned the crucial role of natural resources in the lives and well-being of the Swazi people and the importance of practice management that will be helpful in directing and implementing better strategies for long-term operations.

Retailers should treat authentic luxury brands ethically. Customer managers should find strategies to avoid counterfeits. The resulting message will be more concerned with symbolic value than design aesthetics or brand coherency (Cadle &

Muller, 2018). In addition, both customers and managers should be mindful of representational corruption, which occurs when a business contributes to misrepresenting another group's interests (Ron & Singer, 2020). Avoiding such pitfalls will lead to a more ethical perspective in organizational settings. I avoided the risk of selecting participants without a rationale for the participant's selection.

Participants had choices during the interview to speak freely. During brief interviews and questionnaires, all study participants specified their preferences and justified their choices (Zhou & Parmanto, 2020). I could move forward with the study knowing that participants were chosen based on impartial evidence (Rook, 2018). During triangulation, the final step in participation selection, I harvested rich data, which afforded various results.

The researcher's credibility is crucial in participant selection due to the availability of organizational and report information on the company websites. The Department of Commerce is responsible for information regarding organizations in Eswatini. It was helpful to give more information about the operations of organizations chosen for this project. For example, I reached out to the director of operations and managing executives to obtain permission to engage participants at each organization (see Appendix B).

Explaining the purpose of the study, the intended use of data to be collected, and how the study findings might provide additional insights regarding counterfeit eluding strategies, I requested the gatekeepers sign a collaboration letter. After obtaining a list of potential study participants who met the required appropriate criteria, email addresses,

and direct phone numbers, I emailed an invitation to participate in the research study. Following the acceptance, the researcher sent a follow-up email to explain the research's objective. I utilized the use of intended data collected. The study's findings might help provide additional insights into avoiding counterfeits in luxury brands.

I allowed participants to set an appropriate time and date to set up a 45-minute interview. I was mindful of building a rapport with participants by explaining the importance of participants' contributions and built trust with participants. My explanation authenticated the participants' rights to participation and confidentiality.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The data collecting process is as crucial as all the components of the research process. Collecting data in the usual work setting incorporates a process in which individuals connect as the primary instrument of the data collection process (Yu et al., 2021). I was the primary data collection instrument for this research, I used a semi-structured interview technique as the primary data collection tool to implore data from participants. Yin (2018) suggested that an interview protocol for a qualitative research case study includes (a) an overview of the research study, (b) interview questions, (c) procedures for the data collection, and (d) reconfirming consent to participate. the researcher discussed with the participants to discuss the research topic as per interview protocol.

An interview protocol provided construction to the interview process maintaining similarity to each interview throughout the interviewing process to alleviate bias. See

Appendixes (A) for details of interview communications. The interview questions were open-ended to allow the participants to provide comprehensive information on each topic.

The research process included member checking for ensuring the validity and reliability of the research findings. Livari (2018) suggested that the member checking technique enables more participatory interpretive research practices. During the member checking process, participants were invited to confirm the researchers' interpretations, correct errors, challenge inaccurate interpretations, and reassess their viewpoints where applicable (Livari, 2018).

I employed augmentation and triangulated my findings with secondary information from integrated reports from the documents published online by organizations of interest. I used any documentation shared by participants during the interview, such as published annual or integrated reports, manuals, and strategy documents. Data triangulation from multiple sources, establishing the qualitative results with rich data, can help me attain a positive conclusion (Kent Baker et al., 2020). Different scholars discussed the value of triangulation; Saunders et al. (2015) suggested that triangulation adds depth, breadth, complexity, and richness to the study. Fusch et al. (2018) indicated that in qualitative research, triangulation augments the complexity of the data that is collected. Also, the application of triangulation can enhance the reliability of the study. The Ministry of Natural Resources in Eswatini connected me with legitimate companies with a good reputation in trade with honest company background information and annual reports on their websites. waited for IRB approval then I started. Chapman et

al. (2019) explained the importance of IRB in research that its role is both more essential and narrower than many realize.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The researcher selects a data collection technique to answer the research question. I chose the semi-structured interview as the data collection technique. The research question for my project is, what strategies do luxury brand managers use to deal with counterfeit products' influence on their brands? Yin (2018) suggested that researchers use semi-structured interviews to acquire rich, experiential narratives of the participants' experiences and perceptions, enabling the researcher to give direction and structure to the discussion while allowing a free and open discussion to develop. Data sources will comprise nine managers from luxury brand organizations in Eswatini in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The advantage of the data sources from a reputable organization in Eswatini is that such organizations are credible. Saunders et al. (2015) suggested that the research question is the precursor of research objectives; through experiences, a researcher can obtain credible and rich data to help answer a research question. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) clarified the advantages and disadvantages of using semi-structured interviews. The first advantage of semi-structured interviews is that researchers comprehend the phenomenon thoroughly by asking open-ended questions, guided by a flexible interview protocol (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Secondly, a Semi-structured interview's informal setting encourages participants' honesty (Jong & Jung, 2015). Thirdly, researchers can ask supplemented follow-up questions, investigations, and



comments where necessary (DeJonckheere & Vaugh, 2019). Scholars discussed the disadvantages of semi-structured interviews. Yin (2018) described semi-structured interviews as the susceptibility to bias due to poorly articulated questions and researchers and interviewees finding difficulty recalling the phenomenon during the interview. DeJonckheere and Vaugh (2019) articulated those semi-structured interviews can be intimidating and challenging for novice researchers unaccustomed to the qualitative research method.

Even though scholars discussed the credibility of structured interviews, semi-structured interviews are my preference for the study. Blouin and Pavlov (2011) suggested that structured interviews prove reported as being more reliable than unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews cater for a thorough examination of each participant's experience and motivations. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher uses a fixed set of sequential questions but can introduce additional probing questions to explore further issues brought by the interviewee (Yin et al., 2020). In addition to validating the interview findings, I used member checking to corroborate transcribed participants' responses and collate any new information that may arise post-interview. I sent a follow-up email to the participants with a summary of their responses to conduct member checking. Birt et al. (2016) suggested that member checking validates the credibility of results, results, or data are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences.

I contacted participants via email or phone based on eligibility criteria and set the interview date and time. The target participants consist of 9 leaders from the three to four

luxury brand organizations who have been in operation for over two decades in the Eswatini Sub-Saharan Africa area. the researcher used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) as a tool to guide my conversations with the participants. The research process included member checking to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. Livari (2018) suggested a member checking technique for enabling more participatory interpretive research practices. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher set up Zoom or Skype interviews with the research participants, based on the participant's preferences.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Advocating the adoption of the tracking technology to ensure consistency and coordination in the data flow and mitigate complications in the compilation is vital in data organization. Danışman and Aksoy (2021) advocated the eye-tracking technique, a technique frequently used in determining visual behavior in an advertisement. The researcher must carefully consider data collection methods to ensure they are partaking; representative samples of recipients, experts, and municipal members undergo access for credibility (Heywood et al., 2021). I used a reflective journal to track my learning process. Any biases that the researcher may have about the research and data collected categorizing the data are ways to organize and prepare the data and make it usable for analysis. Saunders et al. (2015) described categorizing as the process where a researcher develops categories and subsequently attaches these categories to meaningful data units for research. I used a file naming system to organize information collected for the research study, CLB Insights (Counterfeit Luxury Brand Insights).

In addition, I used identification codes, such as P1, P2, for participants, and B1, for an organization. The confidentiality of the participants should be well maintained throughout the research. I followed the IRB's guidelines. I used password-protected files to store the data for five years following the study's publication following IRB's measures and terminate using Killdisk software at the end of five years.

### **Data Analysis**

Following data collection, the next step to follow was the analysis and interpretation of research information. Quartiroli et al. (2017) suggested that skype enabled an effective collaborative qualitative data analysis process. The system facilitates team members' communication and analytical consensus building because its unique system features empower all team members to view data in real-time during all phases of the data analysis process. The analysis process includes coding, categorization, and identification of domains. Researchers use a process to collect and analyze qualitative data that involves three concurrent subprocesses of data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Saunders et al., 2015). Collecting data from multiple data sources helps qualitative researchers to mitigate personal bias (Yin, 2018). The process of triangulating researchers' results minimizes their preferences and ensures the reliability and validity of the research findings. Researchers should, therefore, triangulate their data. To assess whether a study constructs reality, a research consumer should ask whether the survey has adequately measured the critical concepts in the study (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

I collected data from different sources, participants, and company reports getting rich data. Triangulation of data is helpful in research because it may include several suggestions, data sources, and methods (Kent Baker et al., 2020). Scholars postulated that methodological triangulation is vital to enable researchers to obtain more insight into a research problem. The use of multiple approaches to provide a more robust understanding of a specific phenomenon is classically methodological diversity (Battaglio & Hall, 2018). Important questions are raised in social science using triangulation.

Triangulation was the final step in participation selection. the researcher ensured that the researcher use triangulation to get rich data, which will afford me good results. the researcher looked up the companies' websites for more information, the researcher also used the information collected during the interviews. the researcher incorporated my notes to avoid bias in the triangulation process. the researcher compared the information with my past resources through my literature review. Comparing the information helped me to get rich data results for the study. It is not enough for both indegree and hub/authority tests to show similar products (Rook, 2018). The researcher's credibility is crucial in participant selection. Strategies for establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research need to connect to the qualitative research process (Carcary, 2020).

For the data analysis process of the study, the researcher applied methodological triangulation to obtain rich data. the researcher triangulated the interview findings with the company documents with the intent of enriching the research. The dataset will help refute where one dataset invalidates a supposition generated by another. Triangulation can enrich research as it offers a variety of datasets to explain different aspects of a

phenomenon of interest (Noble, & Heale, 2019). the researcher followed Yin's (2018) data analysis steps to succeed in my data analysis.

I chose the resource-based theory RBV developed by Barney (1991) as the conceptual framework that the researcher will use to support my proposed study. The four tenets of the RBV are: valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. The four tenets emphasized the firm's resources' characteristics and how acquiring and organizing its resources can help become a central point for a competitive advantage. Consequently, it helped identify the awareness of themes and how they relate to their success. Also, organizational leaders should understand the factors of firms' resources that support a sustained competitive advantage (Ardaneswari et al., 2020). Barney (1991) theorized that organizations would achieve a position of a continuous competitive advantage if the company has the capabilities of the resources that are (a) valuable; not available to other competitors, (b) rare; RBV holds that when resources are unique, competitors have difficulty reproducing them,(c) inimitable; authenticity gives a distinct, credible feel that differentiates resources from other brands, (d) non-substitutable; resources are not substitutable; they cannot reproduce them. As applied to this study, RBV clarifies the strategies leaders in organizations use to avoid counterfeits in their brands that a firm can exploit to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Yin, 2018).

### **Data Analysis Steps**

The steps include: (a) compiling the database, (b) disassembling data, (c) reassembling data, (d) interpreting data, and (e) making conclusions (Yin, 2018). Yin's (2018) five steps to analyze the coding process categories helped me answer my research

question. Augmentation of the results was my focus throughout the process of interviews to avoid bias. The analysis allowed me to recollect all the information written in self-memos during the interview (Saunders et al., 2015).

**Compiling** -The first step in data analysis, according to Saunders et al. (2015), compiled data is processed, such as through some form of selection or summarizing. Data compilation systematically gathers raw data from various sources, including interviews, focus groups, observation, existing records, and electronic devices (Yin, 2018). Data collection co-occurs in qualitative research; some techniques facilitate this, such as taking notes during an interview. Li et al. (2021) suggested that it is essential for the qualitative researcher to familiarize the data collected to understand the data's phrasing or meaning. Scholars further explored the concept of coding. Ciechanowski et al. (2020) explained how someone without coding knowledge could research data science by acquiring primary data. The idea validates how qualitative researchers become familiar with and understand the data and stimulate the data analysis steps in the process. For example, the researcher put the interview data in Microsoft Word on the same day of the interviews to ensure accurate data transcripts to avoid probable loss of information. the researcher meticulously reviewed the recorded interview files for accuracy. the researcher checked the interview summaries and the company documents. After gathering data distinctly, the researcher disassembled the data to maintain confidentiality.

**Disassembling**-Data dissembling involves dissecting data into smaller pieces and assigning codes to categorize information. Among various techniques for protecting code from diverse attacks, code complication is one of the most popular alternatives for

averting code comprehension, code interfering, etc. (Behera & Bhaskari, 2015). Finally, scholars discussed the new set of challenging questions about the broad shift toward the digitalization of how personal information is produced, disseminated, and processed (Park et al., 2018).

The main idea for researchers to code data is to explain why things are and draw conclusions from the information when analyzing the data (Park et al., 2018). The second phase in data analysis is the disassembling of data (Yin, 2018). Some people are better positioned in their capabilities to defend confidentiality than others. At the same time, the rest remain ill-prepared in their awareness and skills to handle potential threats (Park et al., 2018).

I used Microsoft Excel and Word to complete my analysis and used journals to track research activities for transparency. the researcher promoted reflective thinking in the research process and managed critical information for data analysis to enhance credibility (Wanner & Janiesch, 2019). the researcher utilized Word for organizing and coding data and Excel for analyzing data. the researcher assigned category names to information researched from the transcripts. The categories are all based on data names before being diagnosed from the transcripts. The captioning of such information assigned in classes of participants repeat also aligned to the conceptual framework. Disassembling the data into excerpts allowed me to gather similar codes to categorize the data into higher-order themes using thematic hierarchies. the researcher used Microsoft Excel to search for articles and patterns in data analysis. the researcher used the lens of the study's conceptual framework, RBV theory, to prioritize observed themes and categories based

on their significance to the research question. Furthermore, the researcher focused on critical themes that correlate with new studies published since writing the proposal.

**Reassembling-** Scholars connect the third phase in the data analysis process as data reassembling. Ali and Mohamad (2021) defined reassembling technique that incorporates a genomic algorithm to construct the data from uneven pieces into a complete image. Reassembling data entails recombining, categorizing, and clustering data into groups to discover relevant patterns for answering the research question (Yin, 2018). When reassembling, the researcher categorizes all relevant data into potential themes to determine if it represents a whole meaning concerning the coded data set. Defining categorizing data is developing categories and subsequently assigning these groupings to meaningful units of data (Saunders et al., 2015).

**Interpreting-** The fourth phase is data analysis. The data analysis process is an interpretation of data, which involves the abstraction and synthesis of themes from the basis of the interpretation process (Yin, 2018). Describing interpreting data is reviewing data through predefined processes to help assign meaning to information and arrive at a relevant conclusion. Analyzing and interpreting data could potentially lead to a competitive advantage (Chavez et al., 2017). Also, the researcher's interpretation should be happening throughout the 5-phase data analysis cycle. the researcher continued to interpret the data after reassembling the data into patterns and themes. Nowell et al. (2018) asserted that qualitative researchers must establish that data analysis is accurate and reliable for recognition as trustworthy.



An in-depth manner through recording, arranging, and disclosing the analysis methods with enough detail enables the reader to determine any credibility. After reassembling the data into patterns and themes, the researcher interpreted the data. Barnett (2019) asserted that the heartbeat of any culture emanates from building codes and standards about protecting people and property and the result being safe and prosperous communities. Scholars suggested that the interpretations include methodological triangulation of evidence and reliable sources to provide meaning to data and answer the research questions (Yin, 2018). After completing the interpretations process, the researcher used member checking to allow each participant to review my interpretations for accuracy. the researcher conceptualized the theme and relationship between the participant's responses and ensured that the arrangements aligned with the performances aligned with the research question.

**Concluding-** The fifth phase in the data analysis is making conclusions. The use of the 5-phase is constructive and will impact the decision of the research and validate the reliability of the study (Yin, 2018). Summarizing the finding's interpretation in alignment with the conceptual framework and research question will help me conclude the data analysis. the researcher included short and extensive passages of quotations in the report of research findings to aid in the understanding of specific points of interpretation and demonstrate the prevalence of themes (Koliouisis et al., 2019).

Some central themes do seem to be prevalent. First, the researcher increased the transparency of proceedings by balancing the benefits of openness throughout the 5-phase (Kennear & Cannu, 2019). Second, exposure will provide the interpretations and

examples from the data supporting my findings. Third, exposure gave the reader text and a table for easy understanding. Yin (2018) described the word table as an appropriately categorized data table encompassing narrative text rather than numerals inside the tables.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Scholars defined a successful research study to necessitate reliability. A successful research study entails reliability; the consistency and repeatability of producing a case study's findings represent reliability in qualitative research (Yin, 2018). Ensuring the research findings' reliability and validity is one of the critical requirements of a qualitative researcher. It is crucial to build trust and rapport with research participants to feel comfortable enough to invite them into their social scope. The endeavor requires a great deal of time and effort (Hoolachan, 2016). Demonstration of the reliable aspect of the research implementation.

Researchers are to take precautionary measures to address the contributing factors to weak research findings. Heale and Twycross (2015) suggested that validity and reliability are research quality measures. the researcher ensured dependability as part of reliability in this study. the researcher adopted member checking. Naidu and Prose (2018) confirmed that member checking demonstrates the accuracy and trustworthiness of the collected data. Qualitative research handles nonnumerical phenomenological, inseparably tied to human intelligence and subjectivity (Leung, 2015). Connecting the significant contribution of qualitative research, the researcher availed accountability, effective engagement, interchange with participants, and reflexivity from researchers in numerous circumstances in the research process.

Ensuring the excellence and consistency of the research findings is pivotal in a qualitative research study. For a researcher to assess whether an investigation has construct validity, a researcher must establish whether the task has effectively measured the critical concepts in the study (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Building trust and rapport with research participants are essential; they feel comfortable inviting the research further (Hoolachan, 2016).

Defining trustworthiness is to the quality, authenticity, and truthfulness of findings of qualitative research. It relates to the degree of trust or assurance readers have in results (Cypress, 2017). Rigor the quality or state of being very exact, careful, or with strict precisions or the quality of being thorough and accurate. Péladeau et al. (2017) suggested that validity includes credibility, transferability, and confirmability of data.

### **Dependability**

Reliability, also referred to as dependability in qualitative studies, is the stability of the data over time to which consistency in research findings should study necessitate being observed by another researcher. Liao and Hitchcock (2018) emphasized that awareness, informative use, and improved reporting of credibility techniques should be encouraged to promote methodological progress and better-quality evidence in research. the researcher supported claims about the data with quotes from participants. the researcher invited participants to review transcripts creating dependability.

### **Credibility**

The credibility criteria encompass establishing that the results of qualitative research are trustworthy from the participant's perception of the study. The participants

are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the products. Credibility necessitates a realistic description of the phenomenon of interest and the creation of believable research claims and tangible evidence (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). the researcher conducted a member checking of the summarized interpretation of the findings to ensure my research findings' credibility. Amin et al. (2020) suggested that member checking explains each criterion of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Through member checking, the researcher was able to authenticate the summarized interpretation and have an opportunity to obtain additional insights from the interviewees. Triangulation was the proof of the credibility of the research study. Yin (2018) described triangulation as using multiple data sources of evidence to assess the strength of a case study finding and boost the paradigm validity of procedures used in the case study. Researchers use a triangulation strategy to enhance different perceptions and evidence to support excellence in research. the researcher established credibility by recollecting methodological triangulation using semi-structured interviews and document review.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research demonstrate the trustworthiness of their research outcomes (Maxwell, 2021). The qualitative researcher can augment transferability by thoroughly describing the research framework. And the essential assumptions of the research. the researcher used many descriptions and purposeful sampling to accomplish the transferability of the study

findings. the researcher will use analytic generalization, mainly with qualitative research (Maxwell, 2021).

Providing a thorough description of the research process will be my priority, such as data collection and analysis techniques, to ensure a better understating of the research phenomenon and sampling. the researcher used purposeful technologies to provide a better understanding of the research phenomenon. I used a purposeful sample of six to eight organizations in Eswatini Sub Saharan Africa.

I used leaders from nine organizations who have successfully implemented anti-counterfeit strategies to enhance authentic luxury brands in their organizations. Ledin and Machin (2021) suggested that semiotic choices, such as language or design, may serve to recontextualize actual events and processes to represent them in different ways when positioned in instances of communication. the researcher used visual rhetoric for clarity, and further provided detailed descriptions of the research findings to enable the readers and researchers to identify the transferability of the results for future research. the researcher found gaps in the study for future research.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to how other researchers could corroborate other researchers' findings based on the participant's responses. Hai et al. (2020) mentioned protocols affording adequate security to data packets; collected data may still be compromised at acquisition and before aggregation. Data need to be trusted when used efficiently. When the researcher cannot trust the data, he cannot make a proper decision (Hai et al., 2020). To fulfill my intent of confirmability in the study, the researcher

ensured that the researcher sustained duplicate records and utilized my reflective journal. In addition, the researcher reviewed unceasingly the patterns and themes coming from the research findings transversely to all the case studies to ensure the internal coherence of the results.

### **Data Saturation**

Data saturation is the pivotal point for qualitative researchers to conclude the data collection process. Scholars discussed reaching data saturation when there is enough information to reproduce the study, when obtaining further new information and when additional coding is no longer practicable (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is not about the numbers but the complexity of the data (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). Data saturation is the theoretical benchmark for estimating and assessing qualitative sample sizes (Guest et al., 2020). It is essential to decide on the sample's suitable size to ensure the research findings' rigor in addressing the research question. It is vital to understand that deep and insightful interactions with the data are prerequisites for qualitative data interpretation (Maher et al., 2018). the researcher collected data from nine leaders from nine luxury brands organizations in Eswatini Sub Saharan Africa. the researcher concluded the interviews when the researcher gained data saturation. Data saturation allowed me to complete and start my next chapter for the project.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 1, the researcher discussed the background of the problem; the researcher included the problem statement, purpose statement, and the research question that will guide this study. There are six interview questions for this research project.

There was an answer to the research questions which could be significant to business practice. The answer may guide the successful strategies that Eswatini organizations' leaders may use to avoid counterfeits in their brands. The RBV is the conceptual framework for this study. In Section 2, the researcher reported (a) the role of the researcher, (b) qualitative research method, (c) case study method, (d) population and sampling, (e) ethical research, (f) reliability and validity, (g) data collection, (h) data organization technique, and (i) data analysis. In Section 3, the researcher (a) presented my research findings, (b) discussed my findings in application to professional practice, (c) listed implications for social change, (d) offered recommendations for action, (e) proposed recommendations for further research, (f) provided my reflections, (g) close with a conclusion.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative multiple case study aimed to explore strategies that some luxury brand managers use to avoid counterfeits in their brands. The data analysis derived from interviews with the study participants uncovered multiple major and minor themes related to the overarching research question for this study. After I imported the data into NVivo 12 software and Microsoft Excel for the coding process, I used each software to analyze the interview data, and four main themes emerged. I concluded the interviews when I gained data saturation.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The analysis of the interviews with the study participants revealed four strategies to avoid counterfeits. The business managers were a conglomerate organization of individual businesses with single owners who craft traditional products for sale on the global markets. The four major themes were (a) training, (b) innovation, (c) culture, and (d) teamwork. The major themes addressed the overarching research question by revealing the strategies that successful business managers in the luxury brand segment could use to avoid counterfeits in their brands. The study participants believed training was the best way to educate employees and customers to prevent counterfeits. The participants explained how training help enlighten the employees and customers on counterfeit threat prevention. The second strategy was the innovative use of technology.



The participants were able to change the design of their products to avoid counterfeiting. Technology use promoted the advertising of their websites. The third strategy was to create a culture that all participants believed would protect their handmade handicraft products. The companies used natural resources as their source of income. Their cultural affiliations were the main reason the organizations worked hard to make luxury brands from their natural resources. Participants identified and gave examples of artistic help with their production. The fourth and final strategy was teamwork. The participants all used similar anti-counterfeit strategies. The interviewing process during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews, the percentage of zoom conferences was higher than that of telephone communication conversations. Most participants preferred zoom conferencing.

#### Interviews During COVID-19

Modes of interviewing	Number	Percentage
Zoom conferencing	6	66.6
Telephone communication	3	33.4
Total	9	100

Note: Participants had preferences on the technology used for the interviews.

There were a few irregularities: six used Zoom, and three used telephones.

Many participants (66.6%) found Zoom helpful, especially compared to nonvisual communication methods such as telephone or email. Zoom conferencing can be helpful to researcher to quickly identify the participants' ability to respond to nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures, building trust and promoting natural and relaxed conversation (Mark, 2020). Scholars suggested that a zoom is a tool that allows

individuals to capture, transmit and process video conferencing (Mark, 2020).

Interviewing without going to Eswatini helped me to save on traveling costs. Video conferencing is time-consuming, and I am grateful for innovative technological advancements. The advantage of zoom conferencing is that you see the person as if you are on face-to-face meeting. You see facial expressions and connect with the discussion through and conclude on facial expressions.

### Participants

Participant	Educational background	Number of years in position	Position held	Gender
P1	B	40	Managing director	Male
P2	MS	38	Managing director	Male
P3	B	10	Managing director	Male
P4	B	15	Managing director	Female
P5	B	26	Managing director	Female
P6	B	30	Managing director	Female
P7	B	23	Managing director	Female
P8	MS	20	Managing director	Female
P9	MS	10	Managing director	Female

**Note.** Participants were leaders and managing directors of the participant companies, well educated, and had held their positions for more than five years.

I interviewed them in English, because English and Siswati (Eswatini language) are two official languages in Eswatini, and business is conducted in both languages hence I chose the English language for interviews. The interviews lasted 30 to 35 minutes.

There were 6 females' participants and 3 male participants. All the businesses are in the

same category of hand made products (handcraft). The 6 of the 9 were co-founders of their companies. Two were partnership and I found that the themes found in my research aligned with published findings in my current study identified in the literature review.

The first major theme was training employees to be able to train customers to avoid counterfeits influence in their brands. Participants shared how they maintain training and appreciate interacting with employees during training. They shared how they consider training as an incentive to their employees. The second major theme was innovation. This theme included participants' expertise in the use of technology to make unique products from recycled materials, and participants emphasized handmade production and incorporating technology for finishing products to make them unique and inimitable. Participants shared how they collaboratively produced their rare brands for customer satisfaction and considered the rare brands as their business strategy for avoiding counterfeits.

The third major theme was culture. Participants successfully implemented strategies to avoid counterfeits through use of cultural affiliations. Culture in Eswatini played a pivotal role in anti-counterfeit strategies. The participants explained how they use culture in their business dealing because Eswatini culture is non-confrontational, especially when interacting with elders. The participants consistently change their products' sizes and mode of production to remain unique and avoid confrontation. Participants collaboratively agreed on the cultural strategy because they used recycled products and embedding the Swazi culture in their products promoted culture.

Participants used Eswatini colors. They all agreed that culture marked the originality of their products to global markets.

The fourth and final major theme, embodied the broad spectrum in the business realms was teamwork. The participants showcased the teamwork strategy, and all emphasized that teamwork was the reason for their organizations' success. They adapted their business strategies and maintained that the connection with their employees helped their organizations to succeed.

The following section explains how all participants applied the first, second, third, and fourth strategies as a successful tool for preventing counterfeits. Each theme has a table of frequency of minor pieces in the central theme for clarity to the reader.

### **Theme 1: Training Strategy**

The first theme was training employees to be able to train customers to be able to avoid counterfeits influence in their brands. Participants shared how they maintain training and appreciate interacting with employees during training collaboratively established training strategies to teach employees and customers to identify counterfeits. The participants asserted that their employees had an important role in validating and releasing new products. The company's priority is maintaining ethical standards in its designs.

The company's priority is maintaining ethical standards in its designs. The participants emphasized the importance of educating the customer on the negative impact of counterfeits. Employees are encouraged to tell customers that copying a design is illegal and that they should not purchase them. Participant 1 noted, "An international

organization copied our products. We used to deliver five containers to Target stores in the United States five times a year with our products. The business was never the same after the international company copied our products. I had to retrench 400 workers and changing products to small sizes helped organizations facing counterfeits threats to thrive.” The company survived by making smaller products and relying on handmade products. The change of business plan helped find new markets through various small-sized products.

Participant 3 mentioned training employees about ethics: The participant explained that the learning process is mutual, and he also learned from the employees. He reported that “ I had to remove concepts that I learned in London-England and adjust with my team of designers. Connecting with my team has been interesting. I encourages my team to talk to customers about copying other people’s designs and insist on our designs for ethical reasons.” Participant 3 did mention how the lack of legal protection leads to organizations’ vulnerability. Employees are encouraged to talk to customers, bring products for designing in designing a product that copying a design is prohibited and avoid encouraging customers to copy designs in the design industry. Participant 8 mentioned that employees undergo training to follow ethical procedures to ensure that their products are unique.

Participant 9 emphasized the employee training trend that is helping businesses to prosper. Participant 9 reported, "Employees are always willing to learn, and they appreciate the training; they also showcase their skills through training." Participant 7

said, "The raw materials are unique natural resources and not easy to copy. A good strategy to avoid counterfeits."

Participant 4 reported, "I work together with my team, and I help them open bank accounts. They are responsible women who use the proceeds from their handcrafts to educate their kids." The training creates a bond and helps the teams to connect with their managers. The connections between managers and employees are crucial for business progress. Participant 7 noted, "Training my team produced good results. My team always connects with customers to clarify some of the strategies of combating counterfeits, one being authentic with customers always and selling the best products to be credible all the time."

## **Table 2**

Frequency of Minor Themes in Major Theme 1

<u>Minor Themes</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Frequency of Occurrence</u>
Training	9	100%
Education	5	55.5%
International Trading	9	100%

### ***Alignment With Conceptual Framework***

The first significant theme aligns with the framework for studying the RBV (Barney, 1991). In the RBV framework Barney presents four views to help businesses succeed: valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Barney theorized that a company would gain a competitive advantage with rare resources. Training employees to

identify threats aligns with the RBV theory. All nine participants agreed that training employees is a priority for protecting their company's resources. Sensitizing employees to critical business issues like avoiding counterfeits is a positive way of creating a framework of quality that leads to quality production. Participant 3 mentioned that employees should always follow internal training to adjust to ethical procedures to ensure the uniqueness of their products.

### ***Alignment With Literature Review***

One salient idea in the literature was that training trends could help a business thrive. Urban and Dlamini (2020) identified a significant and positive impact on enterprise growth from different institutional and state support factors such as training, regulations, and business support programs. The staff should be able to identify and avoid threats. Training is essential in helping employees and customers know how to identify counterfeit threats. The introduction of training may help reduce counterfeit products and increase authenticity in luxury brands, thereby adding value to the business.

The behavioral theory of arbitrator acceptability is an advancement for organizations to progress in the business. Posthuma and Dworkin (2000) developed the behavioral theory of arbitrator acceptability. Posthuma and Dworkin indicated that firms should use training carefully, and firms should adopt practices that encourage managers and employees to engage in the right behaviors. Further explaining behaviors are things that people do enable psychological ownership to materialize.

The participants demonstrated a positive attitude that compelled employees to stay positive with change through training. All nine participants responded to interview

question 2 in a positive way which came out with the 100% in the frequency table of minor theme of theme 1.

### **Theme 2: Innovation Strategy**

Another central theme that arose from this analysis was innovation strategy. Innovation played a significant role in exporting products to global markets. Innovation also plays an essential role in marketing trends. The websites that help promote merchandise are successful when they are inventive.

Managers use websites to help promote their merchandise to sell to global markets. Mostaghel and Chirumalla (2021) reported that when purchasing products, customers can experience moral fulfillment organizations benefit from innovation by using websites to promote their products to international customers. Innovation proved to be very helpful in keeping ahead of competitors and developing new ideas. Most of the organizations in Eswatini use handcrafted products, which are very difficult to copy. More companies produce goods by hand than machinery production. Participants described their methods for preparing their products for the national and international market.

The following section contains examples of quotes that motivated this central theme. An international company that uses machines cannot afford to copy handmade products. Reinventing products as more miniature figures helped protect the company's products from counterfeiters. In this sense, the company survived by making smaller products and relying on handmade creations, further drawing new markets. Participant 6 noted, "We make unique products, handmade and hand painted. It is an artwork.



Someone who will pick our plan and run-up in a factory hence we create hand made products cannot copy our products. We move on with new concepts to avoid counterfeits. We keep moving with our handcrafted products; we try to get our name, always standing out as the original product.” Diversification of products helped Eswatini firms to thrive and an excellent strategy to avoid counterfeits.

Based on my findings using technology helped the Eswatini businesses prosper. Eswatini luxury brands’ products are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. . Yu et al. (2021) suggested that luxury brands guarantee a closer relationship with customers. Customers’ ability to avoid counterfeit products can help businesses and organizations flourish in Eswatini and globally.

### **Table 3**

#### *Frequency of Minor Themes in Major Theme 2*

<u>Minor themes</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent of occurrence</u>
Innovation	9	100%
Diversification	8	88.8%
<u>Handmade products</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100%</u>

#### *Alignment With Conceptual Framework*

The participants connected the conceptual framework with 88.8% diversification. Inimitable, they can avoid counterfeits. One of the four tenets of the RBV purports that if an organization’s resources are unique, it can prevent counterfeits (1991). Changing products each time t copied proved to be a strategy that helped companies thrive. The participants used a diversification strategy to avoid counterfeits, which worked for them.

Changing their products to smaller sizes was very helpful. Change helped the participants to maintain a good strategy to avoid counterfeits in their products. In imitable products are helpful for an organization to succeed. Participant 8 noted,

***Alignment With Literature Review***

The findings from the current study extend the existing literature by exemplifying the use of the innovation theme. Innovation helped participants to advertise their businesses through their websites. De Montreuil et al. (2021) clarified how organizational changes result from creative conduct promoting and increasing competitiveness with transformation in strategy technologies and work systems. The Eswatini country connected to digital technology some years ago. Yoon (2020) clarified the failure of African countries to gain economic prosperity connected to digital skill deficiency. Yu et al. (2021) suggested that luxury brands guarantee a closer customer relationship. Customers' ability to avoid counterfeit products can help businesses and organizations flourish in Eswatini and worldwide.

The participants in the study demonstrated knowledge of digital applications in their use of technology within their businesses. All participants advertise their products using technology, and they have international customers because of the use of technology. Toyoda et al. (2016) reported that productive efficiency requires that all firms operate using the best technical and managerial processes. Counterfeits can be detected using technology (Toyoda et al., 2016). De Montreuil Carmona and Gomes (2021) clarified organizational changes stemming from creative conduct, promoting, and increasing competitiveness to transformations in strategy, technologies, and work

systems. Participants agreed that innovation was very significant to the success of their organizations. Through advertising and selling products, innovation played a crucial role.

### **Theme 3: Culture Strategy**

Another central theme that arose from this analysis was the cultural strategy.

Both business and tradition Eswatini cultures connected as strategies to help participants to prevent counterfeit threats. The business culture of making market-ready products strategy proved an excellent way to avoid counterfeits. The business culture is one of the strategies used by luxury brand managers to identify strategies managers use to deliver business success. Integrating anti-counterfeiting strategy and knowledge into the business culture helped to progress in the business. Preparedness of business culture for strategy implementation, product development, and understanding of market trends were good strategies. The business culture uncovered participants' descriptions of the adaptations they make to keep the business successful: The business culture of making market-ready products strategy proved to be an excellent way to help organizations prosper.

Participant 5 noted, "Organizational culture is vital to support progression in organizations; every item we produce is a work of art. You do not even know counterfeiters are doing it because they do it on the other side of the world. We connect with people who will remember our story and won't support the fake staff since they know the real staff." Participant 5 noted, "We look for market demand, and we research what is selling slow, choose the fast pace selling." Participant 6 indicated, "Counterfeits threats are always a problem even in small organizations nationally and internationally."

The Eswatini traditional culture which King Sobhuza II instituted is very helpful in helping Eswatini to stand out in Africa as a conventional kingdom with a peculiar African constitutional order (Dlamini, 2019). Sobhuza II selected elements from Eswatini culture and tradition that favored him and integrated them into the modern political spectrum.

The people of Eswatini followed the steps of King Sobhuza II, who, as a traditional ruler, influenced his people; he was Western-educated and had good exposure to modern governance principles (Dlamini, 2019). Participants emphasized the cultural segments of Eswatini. Similarly, participant 9 emphasized that, “Eswatini culture: everything we do influences Eswatini culture, we never keep quiet about that we tell our customers about it.” Market research proved to be another successful strategy to combat counterfeits,

Eswatini’s non-confrontational culture is helpful when businesses experience counterfeits threats. The managers implement strategies that do not approach the counterfeiters. Participant 4 noted, “The Eswatini culture has influenced our team; the work and passion are powerful through culture. Eswatini culture, country, and colors reflect our work the culture connected with how the employees, mainly female artisans, help work with teams. The ladies who make the luxury brands have their handcrafting skills. The Eswatini culture is shining through their work. Company managers rely on product innovation to prevent counterfeits. Participants 1, 2, and 5 emphasized that constantly changing their product implementation strategies has prevented counterfeits. Participant 5 stated, “We do market research; we came across a copying company from

Indonesia making baskets and necklaces. We made our customers aware of the counterfeits. Customers must have confidence in your product to support you." Most participants ( $n=5$ ) purported, "The strategy to use is to make your brand unique, design, or colors, and it involves your storytelling to the world. You cannot stop people from copying your brand even the big brands like CUCCI I experience counterfeits threats. You can only make your products unique and connect to the Eswatini culture, which any counterfeiters cannot substitute. All 9 participants used anti-counterfeiting strategies. Participant 4 noted, "Counterfeiters are not able to copy us because our traditional products tell a story, geographically and historically that cannot be imitated by international organizations."

The traditional way of handcrafting luxury goods proved to be a preventive measure. Participant 5 reported on how culture is affiliated to their production and connected to Eswatini values and pride in excelling in producing unique products. Participant 2 noted, "Eswatini culture interwoven to our products, and that unique touch seen in the products of different shapes and sizes." Traditional ceremonies (Incwala and the Umhlanga Reed Dance) benefit from the organizations through traditional regalia, which the artisans make.

The late King Sobhuza II led Emaswati by example, he empathized with them and encouraged them to stick to their own traditions. He encouraged them to copy good habits from foreigners. He believed Eswatini should be traditionalized to be meaningful to Emaswati (Dlamini, 2019). Empathizing with Emaswati, during the independence inauguration ceremony he was always seen fully clad in his traditional regalia.

All 9 participants focused on the business success linked to flourishing Eswatini products. The culture theme was composed of three minor pieces: market research, product development, and traditional craft. Product development entailed the different design changes that helped their businesses to thrive: Participant 5 noted: “Stay ahead of the game and focus on your brand, not people trying to copy you. That way, you will always be in the front—preparedness for strategy implementation, product development, and understanding market trends. We make market-ready products. We make sure we keep ahead of the competition. We do competitor analysis every year. If you understand the competition, you can always go forward.” In product development, the participants did market research and changed their products constantly to avoid counterfeits. Diversification helped participants to develop their products.

These minor themes include the participants’ experiences with different success stories that boosted their strategy execution—all minor pieces and examples of quotes that motivated these minor themes are provided in the following sections. Market research proved to be very helpful in knowing what is in demand. Most participants (n=5) provided descriptions of different market research success stories and how market research helped the business to succeed. Participant 5 noted, “The strategy is to make your brand unique, design, or colors, and it involves your storytelling to the world.” Participant 3 added, “Traditional crafts are encouraged among the artisans in Eswatini to avoid counterfeits. There are no copyright laws enforced to prevent counterfeiting in Eswatini.” Fafore and Adekoye (2019) recommended strengthening the capacity of law

enforcement agencies to control organized crime in Eswatini. Epo and Faha (2020) mentioned that the reason for corruption in Eswatini is the flawed rule of law.

The participants understood the cost of applying different business strategies and shared their experiences with these costs impacting strategy implementation. All nine participants asserted that they used strategies that did not enable counterfeiters to copy their products. Product development was one of the main preventive measures that worked for participants. In product development, Participant 1 mentioned how changing their product sizes helped the organization thrive when an international company copied the firm's products. Participant 1 noted, "Trading with the US and sending five containers to Target stores six times a year ceased when an international company copied our products. He continued, "I had to retrench 400 employees because of the counterfeits." They discovered their products were copied. Participant 2 also emphasized that, "We keep changing the products and keep moving to avoid being copied." The central point in all participants was both Eswatini culture and business culture which emphasized the prevention of counterfeits, Eswatini non-confrontational culture worked well for all participants. Daily (2001) explored the non-confrontational Eswatini culture in-depth, especially when conducting business. They never argued with counterfeiters, but they changed their products to avoid counterfeits. Dlamini (2010) explained how the people of Eswatini (Swazi people) follow their late king (Sobhuza II) who articulated his political views through the Eswatini culture and tradition which he intended to preserve.

All nine participants demonstrated the business culture. Warrick and Gardner (2021) suggested the need for leaders at all levels of an organization to be skilled at

building cultures capable of achieving excellent results, bringing out the best in people, and offering specific advice on how to do so to effect positive change. Participants 1,2,3,4,5, 6, and 7 agreed on their input in product development, and all nine participants agreed their success in avoiding counterfeit threats was successful because of the traditional culture of handmade products. Collaborating with employees can help to improve performance in business.

**Table 4**

*Frequency of Minor Themes in Major Theme 3*

<u>Minor Themes</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Frequency of occurrence</u>
Culture	9	100%
Market Research	8	88.8%
Product Development	7	77.7%
<u>Traditional Craft</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100%</u>

*Alignment With Conceptual Framework*

Culture connected with 100% in the frequency of minor themes in the significant three scores because all participants joined the Eswatini and business cultures in their daily activities. Implementing strategies to avoid counterfeits included the Eswatini culture and the Eswatini culture of preventing conflict. Whenever there were counterfeits, the managers all mentioned that they kept on moving on with new inventions, and counterfeits were consistently unable to copy innovations. The business managers emphasized that visual rhetoric in the products symbolizes traditional extracts with rare resources which counterfeiters cannot imitate. Only the people of Eswatini will



understand the connection between their products and the Eswatini culture. For example, the products resemble different Eswatini cultural events and cultural outfits embedded in colorful historical and geographical outlooks, the unique elements of the conceptual framework. When resources are excellent, counterfeiters cannot easily copy other companies (Barney, 1991). The unique culture of Eswatini of making amazing products and handmade crafts aligned with the conceptual framework the managers used in their organizations.

### ***Alignment With Literature Review***

The participants understood the cost of applying different strategies for the progression of their approach strategy for avoiding counterfeits. In alignment with the literature review, several participants shared that they worked to create new customer relationships to adapt to new counterfeits threats. Cultural similarities in Eswatini with importers positively affected exporters' expertise (Saleh & Bianchi, 2020). Each participant had some point to make regarding the topic of counterfeits. Participant 6 noted, "Branding is important; it must always get support from storytellers. Everybody should know your product; you market that brand to be visible. Just like the big brands, they know their products. You have a solid product to get your brand known."

Similarly, participant 8 commented on Eswatini culture, "The Swazi culture of hand-made products very hard to copy, very helpful to have a substantial effect of getting your brand known. All participants embraced a culture of avoiding conflict. The people of Eswatini, according to (Dlamini, 2019), are named (Swazi people) and are groomed to respect elders; when conducting business, it is very intimidating to try and make a point,

especially with elders. People need to focus on transforming cultural values and attitudes into positive perceptions to be able to conduct business and implement strategies to avoid counterfeits. I feel grateful as Liswati (Swazi) was born and brought up in Eswatini to know the unique Eswatini culture and how helpful in life to respect your elders.

#### **Theme 4: Teamwork Strategy**

The fourth and final theme was teamwork strategy, which enabled the managing directors and their employees to collaborate. All 9 participants attributed their relationship with artisans to the advancement of their businesses. Participant 3 agreed that learning from artisans led to positive outcomes. Participant 5 said, “The internal thing with our members is we make them sign an agreement not to copy other people. We build our member’s trust and confidence and tell them that what they make is stunning. They do not need to copy anyone else.” The participants collaboratively shared how they collectively apply strategies to help their companies avoid counterfeits

The managing directors I interviewed insisted that through relationship-building, teamwork demonstrated collaborative efforts during communications. The connections proved to be the strategy to avoid counterfeits. Participant 4 explained how the employees protected the authentic products when they saw counterfeits: Participant 4 noted, “It is always an underlying worry if somebody decides to copy. You keep your mission statement shining, and we connect with customers who make them protective on our behalf.” She continued, “customers are on our side and prove the relationship between transformational employee voices.” Participant 7 noted: “We have a good

relationship with artisans we keep an eye on and watch in-house training.” Eswatini luxury brand managers work independently.

Participant 9 noted, “We work as a team with my team, and each time we see counterfeits, we move on to new designs, and the employees are steadfast. All 9 participants corresponded to theme 4 and they responded collectively to interview question 5.

**Table 5**

*Frequency of Minor Themes in Major Theme 4*

<u>Major Theme</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Frequency of occurrence</u>
Teamwork	9	100%
Counterfeits	9	100%

All 9 participants understood the threat of counterfeits and how to prevent and identify counterfeit products. The strategies used by managers to influence the creativity of authenticity in luxury brand organizations in Eswatini excelled throughout the discussions. The discussions with the managers led to the production of saleable products and business sustainability.

***Alignment With Literature Review***

Previous work revealed that communications are a pivotal component in business. The participants described their experiences communicating with employees and customers and shared how they relate the message of hope to avoid counterfeits and make their businesses profitable and viable. Most participants ( $n=5$ ) reported

preparedness for strategy implementation, product development, and understanding of market trends. Market-ready products are the priority. Khanyile et al. (2019) found that luxury brand organizations must collaboratively communicate the best practices and strategies for curbing counterfeit products' exploitation.

Eswatini has many challenges with exporting. Phiri (2020) commented on the high opposing effects of the influence of exports on economic growth in Eswatini. Eswatini handcrafted products are difficult to counterfeit because they are rare, unique, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Participant 4 explained how the organization had been skeptical about counterfeits but had confidence in the unique organizational brand and handmade products. Managers have confidence in staff because they work collaboratively to protect the company brand was an added benefit Participant 3 agreed that learning from artisans developed positive outcomes between leadership and artisans. Participant 3 reported, "In a team of ten, I had to remove what I learned in London (England) to succeed. Connecting with my team has been an interesting journey." All participants mentioned that training teams had played a vital role in their organizations' success. Kim and Koo (2017) the LMX theory helps explore the relationship between transformational leadership and employee voices and the role of relational identification and work engagement as mediators in the process and focusing on the progression of the organization. A collaborative effort helped the participants to develop anti-counterfeit strategies. Participant 4 developed a close relationship with the women artisans; she reported, "We are all women, and I opened bank accounts for each one of the women. We are a neat team; all employees connected to the company," she continued, "When the

artisans see counterfeits like the products we simply laugh and change the designs.” The connection with the artisans is solid, and it is helpful to work as a team to avoid counterfeit threats. Participants did share relevant points to literature in the literature representation through knowledge sharing. Sub-themes revealed relevance to the conceptual framework. The current study’s findings extended the existing literature knowledge of counterfeits and some strategies to avoid counterfeits.

#### ***Alignment With Conceptual Framework***

Theme 4 aligned with the conceptual framework. The study has four pieces that help a firm gain a competitive advantage. The conceptual framework posits four principles to achieve business success. Barney (1991) emphasized that if the firms’ resources are rare, unique, inimitable, and non-substitutable other firms cannot copy them, and the competitive advantage is guaranteed. Participant 4 noted: “I create unique products and use ways of creating it, by doing unique design work to win in the market and such that your competitors cannot copy your products.” Participant 1, after a bad experience with counterfeits, adopted the policy of inventing new and unique products. Participant 6 noted, “We teach people techniques that counterfeiters do not have. They don’t have access to the market which we access. Counterfeiters lack the material to copy our designs. Our company maintains high-quality products handmade and unique.” All participants emphasized creating new products to stay ahead of counterfeiters.

The teamwork strategy helped the participants to work jointly for success in their product development trends which was an excellent strategy to enable customers to return

for more products. Customers return for more products because they value their experiences with an organization compared to other organizations.

With a detailed definition, the natural resource curses in Eswatini heavily depend on natural resources in an economy that causes fiscal dependence, corruption, currency appreciation political domination. Osei-Assibey et al. (2017) stated that the most corrupt region of the world is Africa. The fiscal dependence did connect in a collaborative effort among all participants. Businesses establish to make economic progress. All participants are in business with one focus, fiscal reliance. Eswatini has successfully circulated sound policies into mainstream education (Zwane & Malale, 2018).

Eswatini did fit in the category of the resource curse, the unlawful activities caused by the natural resources available in developing economies. Some participants experienced the corruption of the Eswatini government through some of the participants' past experiences. Combating corruption is Eswatini's most critical task in governance (Hope, 2016). Additionally, participants reported the importance of the version and position of strategies in business.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings connected to managers' experiences of luxury brand companies in Eswatini, sub-Saharan Africa. The results can serve to bridge the current gap in the literature by knowledge sharing through the managers' experiences about avoiding counterfeits. The participants' experiences can enlighten readers of this research about the steps and strategies undertaken by the managers of these companies to become competitive in their field and adapt their business strategies when necessary. The findings

can add to the knowledge of organizational settings in Eswatini. Participants supported the approach they adopted to avoid counterfeits; sub-themes: market research and diversification shed some light on how to combat counterfeits in Eswatini luxury brand companies. The companies' rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable products motivate the conclusions. The participants' experiences are the same, revealing many strategies organizations can use to solve the ongoing problem with counterfeit goods. These participants described the steps and procedures undertaken by their companies. The participants shared how to excel in business and avoid counterfeits.

Business professionals and aspiring business owners can learn to be competitive and how to prevent their products from being counterfeited. Business professionals can benefit from this study by using the participants' experiences and insights. The study encourages employee-customer solid relationships. Smaliukiene et al. (2020) clarified trust-building, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty as essential to the business-customer relationship. As participants asserted, customer-employee solid relationships can be valuable for word-of-mouth advertising. Customers believe what other customers say about a company.

### **Suggestions from the Participants**

- Be confident about your products
- Keep inventing new products to avoid counterfeits
- Embrace change
- Work with employees
- Prioritize customer relationships

- Always do market research to identify counterfeit threats
- Always instill ethical values in your team
- Training staff should be a priority
- Innovation should always be your marketing tool
- Teamwork is to be a cornerstone in business
- Managers should embrace the organizational culture.

The major themes addressed the research question by demonstrating the effective business strategies and methods to determine trends for avoiding counterfeits in the organization's products. Participants shared how they collectively apply strategies to help their companies avoid counterfeits. Participants spoke on the value of recycling products.

Participant 4 mentioned, "Tinsmith from recycled tins, the most sustainable material is rubbish, we aim to show people that what they throw away is very valuable. The idea is to educate and get attention to the value of the rubbished material. We are encouraging people to pick up and produce useful products." Similarly, Participant 5 noted, "Counterfeiters lack the material to copy our designs. We maintain high-quality products. Handmade and unique. When counterfeiters copy us, we take it to complement our products." Participant 2 said the same statement about recycled glass products in his company. He noted, "When counterfeiters copy our products, we take it as a compliment of our products. We keep ahead of the game and change to other designs to avoid counterfeits."



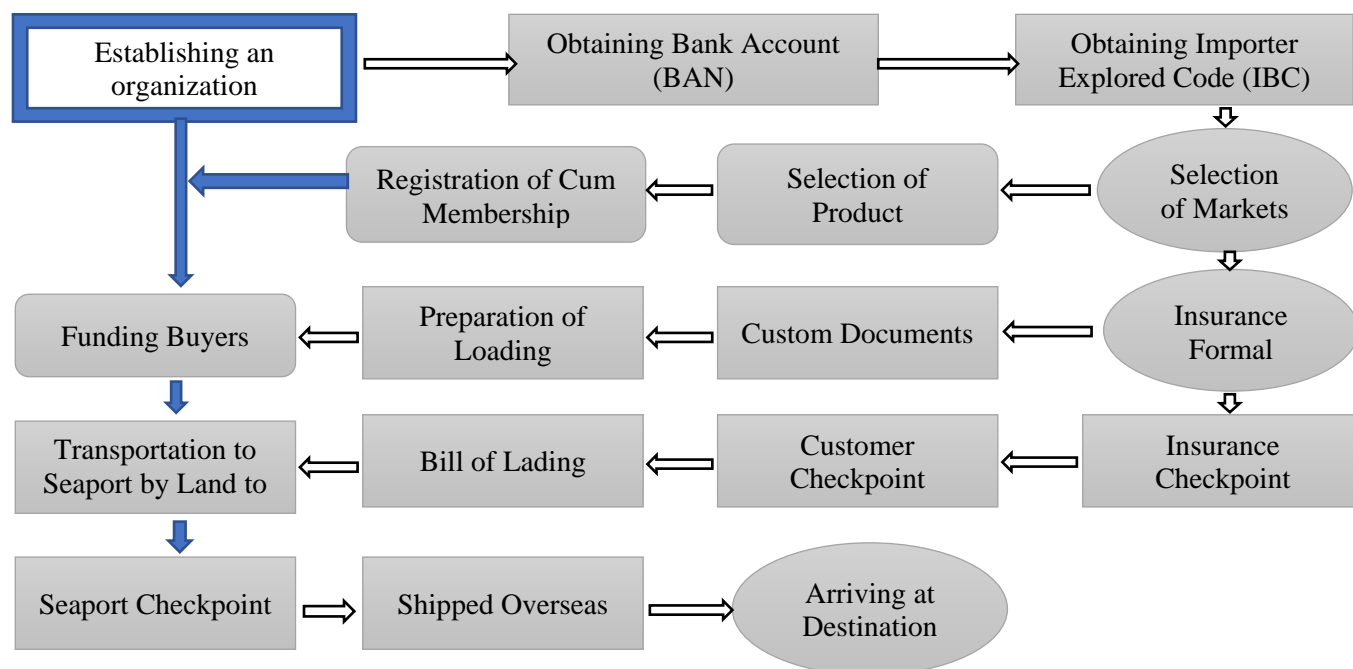
### **Application for Social Change**

The study's first benefit is to help communities maintain good working skills in employees, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies. The second benefit of the study is that Eswatini uses its efforts in getting involved in handcrafted natural resources to support innovation that leads to social change. The third benefit is that entrepreneurs will know how to reduce the number of counterfeits by adopting the strategies discussed that add social value and boost the economy. The participatory approach in which people work hard to end poverty and improve their social and economic well-being is a social change benefit. The community handicraft centers formed by Eswatini women demonstrates social well-being. Products are shipped overseas (see Figure 1). There are many steps that businesses in developing countries must undertake to ship products overseas. Eswatini is a landlocked country. *Figure 1* depicts the transportation of goods by truck and goods train to seaports and dispatched to final destinations. The South African and Mozambique ports are helpful to help transportation to overseas countries

Economic growth has a positive and significant influence on financial development, the demand following the international trade in Eswatini (Fakudze et al., 2021). Luxury brands in Eswatini are sold internationally for fiscal exchange. A good investment trend for economic growth.

Figure 1

### International Trade Shipping Products from Eswatini to Overseas Countries



**Note.** The figure above demonstrates the transportation of goods from Eswatini through neighboring seaports countries, the stages denote the different paperwork that an organization needs to go through before transportation of goods to overseas countries. A step-by-step information for clarity is illustrated in the figure above.

#### Recommendations for Action

The recommendations from this qualitative study can help the managers in the luxury brand businesses in Eswatini Sub Saharan Africa to avoid counterfeits. The luxury brand managers at Eswatini will be able to inform business strategy development, implementation and evaluation and knowledge sharing with their employees and

customers. Theme 1 detailed the necessary action to help businesses train their staff and customers to prevent counterfeits. Training, conferencing, and literature should be used to spread information. Acklin (2020) suggested that ethical parameters expand professional practice boundaries. Training is one expansion of boundaries of professional practice that enables employees to understand and share knowledge with customers. The recommendation would be to use mixed research methods. In addition, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will give the research strength and yield better results. Using qualitative methods to analyze a more traditional survey alongside the interview, focus group, or other quantitative data is essential. Learning from different research methods can help to produce different results. With mixed methods, there can be a variety of answers.

### **Recommendation for Further Research**

The research needed a more extended period to explore strategies for managers to navigate and gain insights to avoid counterfeits. It was confusing to use “counterfeit” because managers initially thought they did not have counterfeit threats in their companies. The participants, however, later became familiar with the term counterfeits. Participants had some solutions to counterfeits after an explanation and simplifying the term.

Recommendations for further study related to improved practice in business could be a longer time frame to explore the topic in greater depth. One of the limitations was the Covid-19 pandemic; I could not travel to Eswatini to interview face-to-face. I was going to be able to see all participants when interviewing, not telephone conversations

with others. A more extensive qualitative research study should be conducted based on the current findings. More participants could be questioned, including government officials and executives from big corporations. There are layers of stories woven into the strands; basketry, a skill traditionally practiced by women, carries multiple stories of livelihoods, hopes, dreams, achievements, and sacrifices. Eswatini baskets are original, rare, and inimitable luxury brands. There should be more research into the stories of the female basket makers.

### **Reflections**

When I started the DBA program at Walden University, I had weak research skills, and I am finishing the program with better ones. I am thankful to my professors at Walden for helping me acquire the research skills. I joined the Grinders, DBA cohort led by Dr. Michael Lavelle in 2019. The Grinders are a group of purpose-driven and mutually supporting doctoral students who help each other during the doctoral journey. I am grateful for this wonderful group because they encouraged and mentored me to finish the program. The researcher faced many challenges from people who were not familiar with the topic; they discouraged me. During the interviewing process, some were unwilling to be interviewed. I have learned to count my blessings and avoid negative thoughts about what did not happen and all the bad experiences that perpetuated my long road in the doctoral journey.

### **Conclusion**

Some government officials declined my request for interviews. Some managers were arrogant, bragging about their knowledge and education, even mentioning that they

are professionals. Business managers should not entertain such behavior. I sincerely appreciate all the private companies and managers who allowed me to interview them. Managers who are not cooperating should not take leadership roles. I sincerely appreciate all the contributions from private companies. These leaders could use the recommendations from the results of this study to enhance strategies to combat counterfeits. In addition, I expect that sharing this study's results may benefit other organizations seeking leadership strategies to avoid counterfeits in their luxury brands.

It was such a humbling and enlightening experience to talk to people who wanted to help me with the study. I have learned to work with multicultural communities. Data collection has been a character-building experience. The findings of this study gave a clear version of how managers in luxury brands in Eswatini Sub-Saharan Africa can avoid counterfeits by training staff, using innovation, using cultural products, and teamwork in their organizations. The focus of training employees is to allow them to be informed about counterfeits threats. Jang et al. (2018) indicated that behavioral engagement is the most transparent way of displaying a luxury brand. Transparency is pivotal in business. A new generation of research suggests that business model innovation helps create and capture value in business (Wang et al., 2020). The study's findings may have a positive outcome through innovation to detect counterfeits and avoid counterfeit threats in organizations.

Culture's significance for development and wellbeing has received recognition in Eswatini. Product development strategy entails four-step plans for distinguishing and developing a new system to detect counterfeits (Khalil et al., 2019). The true meaning of

culture showing through the products. No one can copy the handmade products for the traditional ceremonies made from animal skins, bamboo, traditional material clothes (emahiya), beadwork, and birds' feathers.

The findings of this study revealed that successful implementation of strategies to avoid counterfeit can be a joint effort when managers collaborate with employees. Teamwork can yield the best results in business realms. A unique perception of service excellence's direct and indirect relationships also adds value, client satisfaction, and trustworthiness (Diallo et al., 2018). The strategies identified were some of the leadership qualities portrayed by Gooty et al. (2019) that research had demonstrated a difference between RBV and LMX in exploring emotions and emotional tone dynamics as they change over time. The concept of motivation connects leaders and employees to promote smooth operations. The participants demonstrated the LMX theory by agreeing with employees as part of the teamwork strategy.

It would be beneficial to conduct further investigation and discussion of this topic with other entities, government, and non-profit organizations in Eswatini and to conduct a comparative analysis between the departments in this country.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Siphiwe Mainjeni,

Based on a review of your invitation to participate, I permit you to conduct the study titled, Strategies Used to Combat Counterfeits in Eswatini within (organization name). As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct recruitment of participants, for face-to-face interviews or virtual interviews contingent on local COVID-19 restrictions, collect documents which include the company website, archived documents verify the researcher's interpretation of participant responses or verification of transcripts, and disseminate a summary of the final study results to the participants of the study.

Individuals' participation is voluntary and at their discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing access to potential participants and access to review any archived, annual reports, and information from the company website (documents) that our organization has implemented. In addition, we reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

I understand that the study will not name our organization in the doctoral study that is published in ProQuest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the individual and organizational identities will remain confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorizing Official Signature

## Appendix B Interview Questions

### Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you develop over the years that helped you determine the influence of counterfeits threats on your products in both in-store and online markets?
2. What strategies have proven to be the most successful in training employees to help educate potential customers concerning the adverse effect of counterfeit products on the country's economy.
3. What processes did you put in place that helped your organization implement your strategies to remain viable, avoiding counterfeits when your organization identified the risk?
4. How did the organization prepare to develop and implement strategies for counterfeiting, are there any adjustments made to your strategy implementation?
5. How did the organizations' management team corroborate strategies for identifying counterfeits influence their brands?
6. What additional information or comments can you add to my understanding of your strategies for maintaining authentic luxury brands use to deal with the influence of counterfeit products.