BACHELOR THESIS

TOPIC: THE DUPE ECONOMY — HOW COPYCAT PRODUCTS IMPACT BRANDS IN BEAUTY, FASHION, AND COLLECTIBLES

Dupe culture is everywhere. Affordable copycat products are flooding the beauty, fashion, and toy markets. Whether it's e.l.f. mimicking Charlotte Tilbury's flawless glow, Shein replicating runway designs within days, or dozens of Sonny Angel and Labubu lookalikes popping up on Temu and random shops on Mariahilferstraße, dupes are challenging how we think about brand value, authenticity, and originality.

This thesis explores how the growing popularity of dupes affects both brand perception and sales — using real-world data where available and experiments where it's not.

1. Beauty: Sales Impact of Dupes

Use sales data to examine how viral dupes affect the original product's performance.

Method: Difference-in-differences (DiD) using known dupe release or viral moments as treatment events.

2. Fashion: Brand Perception Shifts via YouGov BrandIndex

Measure how social media attention around fast-fashion dupes or luxury copycats influences brand perception metrics (e.g., impression, value, recommendation).
Examples:

- *SKIMS* vs. *Shein shapewear*
- *Maison Margiela "Replica" fragrances* vs. *Zara or Dossier dupes*
- *Bottega Veneta bags* vs. affordable alternatives promoted on TikTok

Method: DiD using YouGov BrandIndex data + media coverage timelines.

3. Toys: Experimental Test of Consumer Reactions to Dupes

Since there's no real data on collectibles like Sonny Angels or Labubus clones, you'll design an online experiment.
Participants will rate or choose between real and dupe products — either blindly or with brand context.
Examples:

- *Sonny Angels* vs. unlicensed angel figurines sold on Temu
- *Lafufu/Labubu* vs. generic bootleg alternatives with similar art style

- *POP MART exclusives* vs. copycats

Method: Online behavioral experiment, randomized between branded vs. unbranded product images or descriptions.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

- Collect and clean real sales data (beauty) and YouGov data (fashion)
- Track relevant social media or news coverage to pinpoint dupe "events"
- Run DiD analysis to test causal effects
- Design and implement a short online experiment for toy dupes
- Present your results with clear visualizations and interpretation

YOU MIGHT ENJOY THIS TOPIC IF YOU...

- Follow beauty/fashion trends or are interested in/weirded out by collectibles
- Want to explore the tension between authenticity and affordability
- Enjoy working with data and are curious about causal inference
- Want a thesis that blends marketing, consumer psychology, and digital culture

PREREQUISITES

- Interest in empirical research and digital marketing
- Basic knowledge of statistics
- Willingness to use R (or Python) for analysis, with support from the supervisor

LITERATURE & LINKS

Academic Literature

Appel, Gil, Barak Libai, and Eitan Muller (2018). "On the Monetary Impact of Fashion Design Piracy." *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 35(4), 591–610.

Chaudhry, Peggy E. (2022). "Dupe Influencers Exploiting Social Media to Peddle Luxury Fakes." *Business Horizons*, 65(6), 719–727.

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Nguyen, Hang, and Kunter Gunasti (2018). "Original Brands in Competition Against High Quality Copycats." *European Journal of Marketing*, 52(7/8), 1574–97.

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Stahl, Florian, Mark Heitmann, Donald R. Lehmann, and Scott A. Neslin (2012). "The Impact of Brand Equity on Customer Acquisition, Retention, and Profit Margin." *Journal of Marketing*, 76(4), 44–63.

Industry Reports / Media Coverage

Danziger, Pamela N. (2023). "Shopping Cosmetic Dupes Is Tricky. Dupeshop Beauty Solves for That." *Forbes*. Read here

Hill, Amelia (2024). "Counterfeit Goes Cool: High-End Brands Urged to Embrace Rise of #Dupe." *The Guardian*. Read here

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Solá, Ana Teresa (2023). "With Gen Z, Millennials Now the Biggest 'Dupe' Shoppers, Online Culture Has 'Flipped the Script,' Analyst Says." *CNBC*. Read here

Statista (2024a). "Beauty & Personal Care – Europe: Market Forecast." View here

Statista (2024b). "Europe: Consumer Interest in Dupes 2024." View here

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HOW TO APPLY

You can apply for this topic by filling in the **application form** (available here) and sending it to Alicja Grzadziel (alicja.grzadziel@wu.ac.at). Please include your preferred topic and first ideas.