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# Loyal to the Crest, Not Limited by the Wallet: The Effect of Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team on the Intention to Purchase Counterfeit Club Products

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**Abstract**
This study investigated the effect of emotional commitment to the sports team on the intention to purchase counterfeit club products and examined the role of perceived income level in this relationship. A quantitative research design based on the relational survey model was employed. The sample consisted of 467 football fans residing in Erzurum, selected through the snowball sampling method. Data were collected via face-to-face questionnaires, and reliability analyses confirmed high internal consistency. After testing normality assumptions, correlation and moderation analyses were conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1) with 5000 bootstrap samples. The results showed a significant negative relationship between emotional commitment and counterfeit product purchase intention, indicating that stronger attachment to the team reduces the tendency to buy counterfeit products. However, perceived income level did not significantly moderate this relationship. These findings suggest that emotional commitment is associated with lower counterfeit purchase intention, independent of income differences. The study contributes to understanding sport-related consumer behavior and provides practical insights for sports clubs to enhance fan loyalty, promote licensed merchandise, and develop more effective anti-counterfeiting strategies.

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# Introduction

Emotional commitment to the sports team refers to the affective bond that fans develop with their team, reflecting the extent to which the team becomes an integral part of their self-concept and emotional life. In the context of football, emotional commitment to the sports team is manifested through fans' strong emotional attachment to their teams, the frequency with which they follow matches, and their consumption-related behaviors (Aydın & Kurudirek, 2025; Dwyer et al., 2018). Fans who experience a high level of emotional commitment to the sports team tend to internalize team-related values and norms, which plays a significant role in shaping their consumer identities and guiding identity-consistent consumption choices (Chung et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2007). The strength of the emotional bond between fans and their teams substantially influences purchasing behavior, particularly in relation to team-related products (Byon et al., 2010; Kwon et al., 2022). Similar to other forms of relational consumption, the relationship between fans and their teams is largely governed by emotion-driven processes (Aggarwal, 2004). Consequently, emotional fluctuations can be observed within the fan-team relationship, making consumption decisions open to both positive and negative responses (Romani et al., 2009). Fans with strong emotional commitment to the sports team are generally inclined to purchase team-related products; however, the realization of this inclination may be constrained by economic conditions, which can lead some fans to consider counterfeit alternatives.

Counterfeit products are defined as imitations that are deliberately reproduced with detailed precision to resemble original items (Zahari et al., 2016). In the process of constructing a consumer identity, individuals' behaviors do not always follow a consistent or linear pattern. Fans who experience internal conflicts between their emotional attachment to the team and economic limitations may display ambivalent purchasing tendencies, resulting in variations in consumption behavior (Antonetti et al., 2025; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). From a consumer culture perspective, individuals seeking prestige and social status may attempt to reinforce their social identity through the consumption of elite brands; however, when confronted with financial constraints, counterfeit products may be perceived as accessible alternatives (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Perez et al., 2010). Technological advancements have intensified counterfeiting practices, transforming them into a major global industry (Chiu et al., 2014). As the sports industry continues to expand, licensed

sports products have become increasingly important for football clubs seeking to strengthen fan loyalty and financial sustainability. Nevertheless, while some fans consistently purchase licensed merchandise, others-despite their emotional commitment to the sports team-may occasionally prefer counterfeit products due to situational or economic considerations (Avcı, 2024).

Drawing on Social Identity Theory, emotional commitment to a sports team reflects the extent to which individuals define themselves through their affiliation with the team and internalize team-related values and norms (Tajfel et al., 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Prior research in sport consumer behavior demonstrates that emotionally committed fans perceive their team as an integral component of their social identity, which, in turn, shapes their consumption-related decisions and loyalty behaviors (Mahony et al., 2000; Yoshida et al., 2014). From this perspective, purchasing counterfeit club products may be perceived as inconsistent with the symbolic meaning of authentic team support, as counterfeit consumption violates shared group norms and undermines the perceived authenticity of fandom. Consistent with identity-signaling and norm-based perspectives, consumers tend to avoid behaviors that conflict with valued group identities and moral expectations (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Kononova et al., 2024). Accordingly, emotionally committed fans are more likely to refrain from purchasing counterfeit products in order to maintain identity consistency and signal genuine loyalty to their team.

Previous studies further suggest that consumers with lower income levels may be more inclined to purchase counterfeit products due to financial constraints and affordability considerations (Wu & Zhao, 2021; Elsantil & Bedair, 2022). Research on counterfeit consumption indicates that economic motivations, such as price sensitivity and perceived value, play a significant role in shaping purchase intentions (Quoquab et al., 2017). However, from an identity-based perspective, emotional commitment represents a relatively stable psychological bond grounded in social identity and group membership, which may guide consumer behavior independently of economic conditions (Tajfel & Turner, 2004;). As a result, while income level may influence counterfeit purchasing behavior in general, its role in conditioning the relationship between emotional commitment to the sports team and counterfeit purchase intention remains theoretically ambiguous.

Despite the extensive literature on emotional commitment and team identification in sport consumption, prior studies have mainly examined

outcomes such as loyalty, satisfaction, and intentions to purchase licensed merchandise (Biscaia et al., 2013; Kunkel et al., 2016). In contrast, research on counterfeit consumption has largely focused on general consumer-level determinants, including attitudes, perceived risk, moral judgment, and price sensitivity, without adequately accounting for fan-team emotional attachment (Eisend, 2019; Riquelme et al., 2012). Consequently, empirical evidence on how emotional commitment to a sports team shapes fans' intentions to purchase counterfeit club merchandise remains limited. Moreover, although income level is widely recognized as a key driver of counterfeit consumption, recent studies suggest that economic factors may interact with psychological and identity-based motives rather than operate solely as direct predictors (Jiang & Shan, 2016; Samaddar & Menon, 2025). Thus, the moderating role of perceived income status in emotionally grounded and identity-driven sport consumption contexts remains theoretically unclear. Addressing this gap contributes to the literature by integrating emotional, identity-based, and economic perspectives within a single analytical framework.

Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the effect of emotional commitment to the sports team on the intention to purchase counterfeit club merchandise and to explore whether perceived income status influences this relationship. Based on this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*$H_1$: Emotional commitment to the sports team negatively affects the intention to purchase counterfeit club products.*
*$H_2$: Perceived income status may influence the relationship between emotional commitment to the sports team and the intention to purchase counterfeit club products.*

## Method

### Research Design

This study was designed within the framework of a relational survey model. The research examines the relationship between fan fanaticism and the intention to purchase counterfeit club merchandise, and also evaluates the moderating role of perceived income status in this relationship. Since the relational survey model aims to identify the direction and degree of relationships between existing variables, it was considered an appropriate design for the purpose of this study. Accordingly, the proposed research model illustrating the

hypothesized relationships among the variables is presented below (Figure 1).
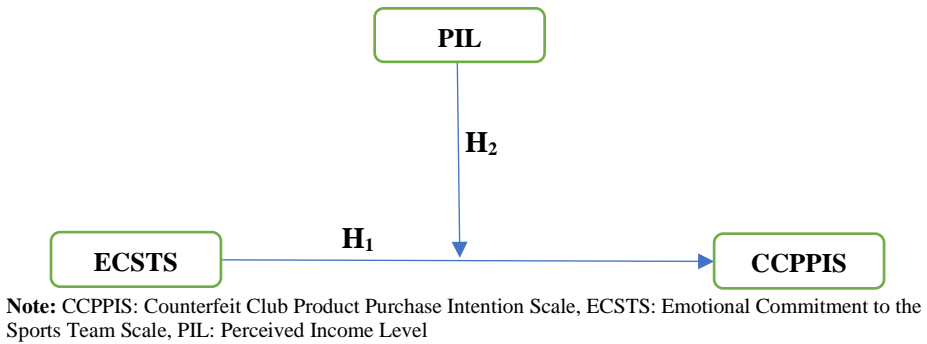


**Note:** CCPPIS: Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention Scale, ECSTS: Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team Scale, PIL: Perceived Income Level

**Fig 1.** Proposed research model

*Research Group*

The population of the study consists of football team supporters residing in Erzurum. The sample group was composed of 467 football fans, determined through the snowball sampling method. The snowball sampling method is based on expanding the sample through the recommendation of new participants by the initially selected individuals who meet the research criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

Accordingly, data were collected through students attending the researcher's courses at the faculty, who assisted in reaching their friends and family members within their close social circles. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face and collected using the same procedure. Questionnaires that were incomplete or filled out incorrectly were excluded from the analysis.

A total of 467 football fans participated in the study, of whom 237 were female (50.7%) and 230 were male (49.3%). This distribution indicates that the sample has a balanced gender composition.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of participants

| Variable | Group | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | 237 | 50.7 |
| | Male | 230 | 49.3 |
| **Age** | 18-20 years | 175 | 37.4 |
| | 21-24 years | 138 | 29.6 |
| | 25 years or older | 154 | 33.0 |
| **Education Level** | Primary/Secondary/High School Graduate | 98 | 21.0 |
| | Associate/Bachelor's Student | 221 | 47.3 |
| | Associate/Bachelor's Graduate | 118 | 25.3 |
| | Master's Student | 17 | 3.6 |
| | Master's Graduate | 13 | 2.8 |
| **Occupation** | Student | 260 | 55.7 |
| | Public Sector Employee | 58 | 12.4 |
| | Private Sector Employee | 61 | 13.1 |
| | Other | 88 | 18.8 |
| **Perceived Income Level** | Low | 285 | 61.0 |
| | High | 182 | 39.0 |
| **Supported Team** | Beşiktaş | 79 | 16.9 |
| | Fenerbahçe | 147 | 31.5 |
| | Galatasaray | 185 | 39.6 |
| | Other Teams | 56 | 12.0 |
| | **TOTAL** | **467** | **100.0** |

Table 1 shows that the highest proportion of participants falls within the 18-20 age range (37.4%; n=175). This finding indicates that the majority of the sample consists of young individuals. In terms of educational level, the largest group of participants were associate/bachelor's students (47.3%; n=221). Regarding occupation, a significant portion of the participants were students (55.7%; n=260). Examination of the perceived income level variable revealed that most participants perceived their income level as low (61.0%; n=285). In terms of the supported team variable, the largest group of participants were Galatasaray supporters (39.6%; n=185). Overall, these results indicate that the sample predominantly consists of young, student, low-income individuals who support Galatasaray.

*Data Collection Instruments*

1.  Personal information form

This form was designed by the researchers to determine the demographic characteristics of the study group, including gender, age, educational level, occupation, perceived personal income level, and the supported football team.

## 2. Emotional commitment to the sports team scale

The Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team Scale (ECSTS), developed by Dwyer et al. (2015) and adapted into Turkish by Erdoğan and Şirin (2021), consists of 7 items and 2 subdimensions: Cognitive Investment and Emotional Investment. The scale is a 7-point Likert-type, ranging from "1: Strongly Disagree" to "7: Strongly Agree."

During the adaptation process conducted by Erdoğan and Şirin (2021), the Cronbach's Alpha (α) reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.94 for the Cognitive Investment subdimension, 0.95 for the Emotional Investment subdimension, and 0.97 for the overall scale.

In the reliability analysis conducted within the scope of the present study, the Cronbach's Alpha (α) values were found to be 0.910 for the Cognitive Investment subdimension, 0.973 for the Emotional Investment subdimension, and 0.966 for the total scale.

## 3. Counterfeit club product purchase intention scale

In this study, the Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention Scale (CCPPIS), adapted into Turkish by Avcı (2024) based on the studies of Liu and Shi (2019) and Khan et al. (2023), was used. The scale consists of 3 items and a single dimension. The Cronbach's Alpha (α) reliability coefficient for the original adaptation was 0.836.

Based on the data obtained in this study, the Cronbach's Alpha (α) reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.947, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

### *Data Collection Process*

The study was conducted in accordance with the approval granted by the "Atatürk University Faculty of Sports Sciences Ethics Committee" (Approval No: E-70400699-050.02.04-2500272761, Decision No: 172, Date: August 21, 2025). The data collection process was carried out between September 29 and October 3, 2025. During this process, participants were reached through the snowball sampling method employed in the sampling stage.

In the first phase, questionnaire forms were administered to students in the classroom environment, and participants were informed that the collected data would be used anonymously and solely for scientific purposes. Students were

then asked to share the questionnaire with their friends and family members who met the research criteria, thereby allowing the sample to expand progressively.

Prior to participation, all respondents were clearly informed about the purpose, scope, and confidentiality principles of the study. They were assured that no personal information would be recorded, that their responses would be analyzed only for scientific purposes, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants who read and approved the information statement completed the data collection tools on a voluntary basis.

During data collection, sufficient time was provided for participants to complete the questionnaires. The researcher did not intervene in the process to avoid influencing responses and only provided technical assistance when necessary. To minimize common method bias, anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized, the order of scale items was randomized, and the application environment was arranged to avoid distractions.

Moreover, to reduce the potential impact of common method variance, several procedural remedies were implemented during the data collection process. Participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers, and the predictor and outcome variables were presented in separate sections of the questionnaire to reduce respondents' ability to infer hypothesized relationships. These procedural steps were intended to mitigate bias associated with self-reported, single-source data.

In addition, Harman's single-factor test was conducted during the analysis phase. The results showed that the variance explained by a single factor was 34.2%, which is below the 50% threshold, indicating that common method bias was not a significant issue in this study.

*Statistical Analysis*

Before proceeding with the analyses, the data set was examined to determine whether it met the assumptions of parametric tests. Accordingly, to evaluate the assumption of normality, skewness and kurtosis values, as well as Q-Q (Quantile–Quantile) plots, were utilized.

For the Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team (Fanaticism) Scale, the skewness value was -0.459 and the kurtosis value was -1.050; for the Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention Scale, the skewness value was

0.138 and the kurtosis value was -1.251. Since these values fall within the acceptable range of ±1.5, and the Q–Q plots indicated that the data were distributed close to the theoretical diagonal line (George & Mallery, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), it was concluded that the data exhibited an approximately normal distribution. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to use parametric statistical methods in the analysis process.

In the study, fanaticism was treated as the independent variable, counterfeit club product purchase intention as the dependent variable, and perceived income level as the moderating variable. In this context, perceived income level was categorized into two groups: "low" and "high".

To test the moderating effect among the variables, PROCESS Macro (Model 1) developed by Hayes (2018) was employed. Within this model, it was examined whether the effect of fanaticism on counterfeit club product purchase intention differed according to individuals' perceived income levels. The model simultaneously assessed both the direct effect of fanaticism on the dependent variable and the moderating effect of perceived income level on this relationship.

In the moderation analysis conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1), predictor and moderator variables were automatically mean-centered by the macro prior to computing the interaction term. Analyses were conducted using the bootstrap method with 5000 resamples, and results were interpreted based on a 95% confidence interval (CI = 0.95).

## Findings

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient between ECSTS and CCPPIS

| Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. ECSTS | 4.65 | 1.98 | - | |
| 2. CCPPIS | 2.64 | 1.26 | -0.371*** | - |

**Note:** ***p< 0.001, ECSTS: Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team Scale, CCPPIS: Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention Scale

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient between Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team (ECSTS) and Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention (CCPPIS). As shown in the table, there is a significant negative correlation between ECSTS and CCPPIS (r = −.371, p < .001). According to Cohen's (1988) conventional benchmarks for effect size

(small ≈ .10, medium ≈ .30, large ≈ .50), this correlation represents a moderate effect size, indicating a meaningful association between the two variables. This finding indicates that as individuals' emotional commitment to their sports team increases, their intention to purchase counterfeit club products decreases. In other words, stronger fan attachment is associated with a lower tendency toward counterfeit consumption behavior.

**Table 3.** Moderation analysis results for the effect of emotional commitment to the sports team on counterfeit club product purchase intention by perceived income level

| Independent Variables | *b* | SE | t | p | LLCI | ULCI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Constant* | 2.636 | 0.045 | 57.731 | **0.000*** | 2.546 | 2.726 |
| *ECSTS* | -0.178 | 0.023 | -7.750 | **0.000*** | -0.224 | -0.133 |
| *PIL* | -1.365 | 0.093 | -14.542 | **0.000*** | -1.550 | -1.181 |
| *Interaction (ECSTS × PIL)* | 0.028 | 0.047 | .606 | 0.544 | -0.064 | 0.121 |
| **Model Summary** | R | R² | F | df1 | df2 | p |
| | 0.639 | 0.408 | 106.583 | 3 | 463 | **0.000*** |
| | ECSTS × PIL | ΔR² | F | df1 | df2 | p |
| | | 0.0005 | .367 | 1 | 463 | 0.544 |

*Dependent Variable: CCPPIS*

**Note:** ***p< 0.001, ECSTS: Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team Scale, CCPPIS: Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention Scale, PIL: Perceived Income Level

Table 3 presents the results of the moderation analysis conducted to examine the effect of Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team (ECSTS) on Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention (CCPPIS), with Perceived Income Level (PIL) as a moderating variable.

As shown in the Table 3, the overall model was found to be statistically significant (F(3, 463) = 106.583, p < 0.001), explaining approximately 40.8% (R² = 0.408) of the variance in counterfeit club product purchase intention. Emotional commitment to the sports team (b = –0.178, p < 0.001) and perceived income level (b = –1.365, p < 0.001) had significant negative effects on purchase intention. However, the interaction term between emotional commitment and perceived income level (b = 0.028, p = 0.544) was not statistically significant. This indicates that perceived income level did not moderate the relationship between emotional commitment to the sports team and counterfeit club product purchase intention.

In summary, Table 3 demonstrates that emotional commitment to the sports team and perceived income level are significant predictors of counterfeit club product purchase intention; however, the moderating role of perceived income level was not supported.

**Table 4.** Predicted values of CCPPIS by ECSTS levels at low PIL

| ECSTS Level | PIL | Predicted CCPPIS |
|---|---|---|
| *Low ECSTS (-2.5050)* | Low Income (-0.3897) | 3.6443 |
| *Moderate ECSTS (0.3521)* | Low Income (-0.3897) | 3.1016 |
| *High ECSTS (2.3521)* | Low Income (-0.3897) | 2.7218 |

**Note:** ECSTS: Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team Scale, CCPPIS: Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention Scale, PIL: Perceived Income Level

Table 4 presents the predicted values of counterfeit club product purchase intention (CCPPIS) across different levels of emotional commitment to the sports team (ECSTS) for individuals with low perceived income levels. The values are provided to illustrate the pattern of the relationship between ECSTS and CCPPIS within this income group. Given that the interaction term between emotional commitment and perceived income level was not statistically significant, these predicted values are reported for descriptive purposes only and should not be interpreted as evidence of differential or conditional effects.

**Table 5**. Predicted values of CCPPIS by ECSTS levels at high PIL

| ECSTS Level | Perceived Income Level | Predicted CCPPIS |
|---|---|---|
| *Low ECSTS (-2.5050)* | High Income (0.6103) | 2.2066 |
| *Moderate ECSTS (0.3521)* | High Income (0.6103) | 1.7459 |
| *High ECSTS (2.3521)* | High Income (0.6103) | 1.4235 |

**Note:** ECSTS: Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team Scale, CCPPIS: Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention Scale

Table 5 presents the predicted values of Counterfeit Club Product Purchase Intention (CCPPIS) across different levels of Emotional Commitment to the Sports Team (ECSTS) for individuals with high perceived income levels. These values are reported to descriptively illustrate the pattern of predicted CCPPIS scores across ECSTS levels within the high-income group. Given that the interaction term between emotional commitment and perceived income level was not statistically significant, the predicted values in Table 5 are presented for exploratory and illustrative purposes only. Accordingly, they should not be interpreted as evidence of meaningful simple slopes or differential effects across income levels.

Following Tables 4 and 5, an interaction plot was generated solely to visually summarize the overall pattern observed in the data. Consistent with the non-significant interaction effect, the figure is not interpreted as indicating conditional relationships but is provided to aid descriptive understanding of the model results.
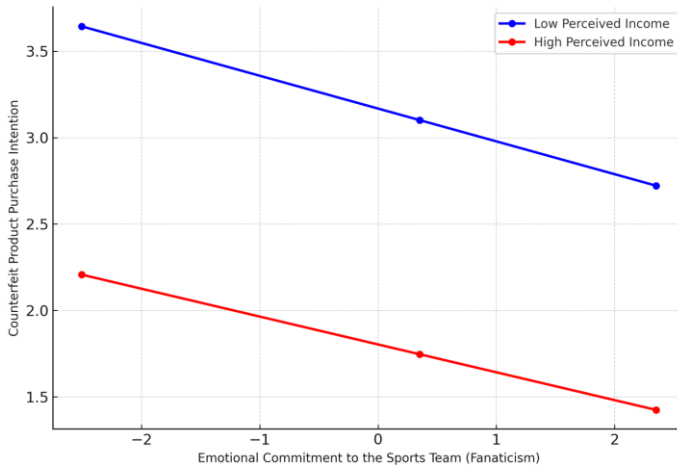
**Fig 2.** Interaction effect of emotional commitment to the sports team and perceived income level on counterfeit product purchase intention

Figure 2 illustrates the interaction between emotional commitment to the sports team and perceived income level on counterfeit product purchase intention. The figure shows that counterfeit purchase intention decreases as emotional commitment increases across both income groups. Consistent with the non-significant interaction term, the slopes appear largely parallel, indicating that perceived income level does not meaningfully condition the relationship between emotional commitment and counterfeit product purchase intention. Accordingly, the figure is presented for descriptive visualization of the model results only and should not be interpreted as evidence of differential or conditional effects across income levels.

## Discussion

This study found that emotional commitment to the sports team (ECSTS) is negatively associated with counterfeit club product purchase intention (CCPPIS), whereas the interaction with perceived income level (PIL) was not significant. Accordingly, H1 was supported, indicating that higher levels of emotional commitment to the sports team are associated with lower intentions to purchase counterfeit club merchandise. Conversely, H2 was not supported, as perceived income level did not significantly moderate this relationship.

The negative main effect aligns with sport consumer behavior work showing that stronger fan attachment and identification tend to promote pro-team consumption and reduce behaviors incongruent with team norms, such as supporting illicit markets that harm the club's brand equity (Chiu et al., 2014). Previous research has consistently shown that fans with stronger team identification or emotional attachment are more inclined to purchase officially licensed merchandise, largely because such attachment enhances perceived value and other positive evaluations of authentic products (Kwon et al., 2007; Kwon & Kwak, 2014; Lee & Trail, 2011). Building on this evidence, recent meta-analytic findings further indicate that strong fan attachment not only promotes pro-team consumption but may also discourage counterfeit purchasing by evoking perceptions of moral or identity misalignment and reduced symbolic value (Kwon et al., 2022).

Specifically, Kwon et al. (2007) demonstrated that perceived value mediates the effect of team identification on licensed purchase intentions; later replications further emphasized that identification per se is not always sufficient unless translated into value perceptions and attitudes. In our context, higher ECSTS may reduce counterfeit purchase intention because counterfeits undermine perceived value-in-use and value-in-identity (e.g., signaling, authenticity, collective identity), consistent with broader sport and sponsorship literature on fan-based value creation (Shapiro et al., 2019). In parallel, recent research shows that sport-related identification improves downstream intentions in varied contexts (e.g., social media/influencer settings), reinforcing the general pathway from identification/attachment to favorable consumption intentions and away from behaviors at odds with team affiliation (Lee, 2021).

Regarding counterfeits, extensive consumer research indicates that purchase intentions are often driven by social-adjustive motives (fitting in, status signaling) and cost–value trade-offs, even when quality considerations are secondary (Singh et al., 2022; Wilcox et al., 2009). In TPB-based studies across markets, counterfeit purchase intention is shaped by attitudes, norms, and perceived control, frequently moderated by income or affordability perceptions (Ting et al., 2016). Evidence from emerging markets also reveals income-related patterns in counterfeit demand, with some studies showing that higher income reduces counterfeit propensity, while others suggest that this relationship varies depending on factors such as product category and the

salience of ethical considerations (Gani et al., 2019).

Against that backdrop, our non-significant moderation by PIL is informative. One plausible explanation is that ECSTS exerts a robust, value- and identity-laden constraint that operates across income strata, thereby attenuating the role of income as a boundary condition. When fan attachment is strong, brand-protective norms and moral/identity consistency may dominate affordability considerations-consistent with evidence that attachment/identification can outweigh purely economic drivers in sport consumption (Kwon et al., 2007). Methodologically, two additional factors could also dampen moderation detection: (a) dichotomization of perceived income, which reduces variance and power to detect interactions; and (b) a student-heavy, young sample, where between-group income dispersion is narrower and counterfeit attitudes may be more normatively bounded. These considerations mirror reports that moderation by income on counterfeit-related attitudes is sample- and context-sensitive (Gani et al., 2019; Harun et al., 2020).

In summary, the findings support H1 but not H2, reinforcing that emotional commitment to the sports team is associated with lower counterfeit purchase intention. Given the non-significant interaction effect, this relationship should be interpreted as a general main effect rather than as differing across income groups. The results align with prior research emphasizing that strong emotional bonds with a team heighten the perceived inconsistency between genuine team support and participation in counterfeit markets that undermine club revenues and shared fan identity. This heightened moral and identity-based incongruence likely diminishes counterfeit purchase intentions, consistent with identity-signaling perspectives on consumer behavior (Wang et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2018).

## Conclusions

In sum, stronger emotional commitment to one's team is associated with lower intention to purchase counterfeit club products, and this association reflects a stable main effect rather than income-contingent differences in our sample. The results reinforce the centrality of fan attachment and value-based mechanisms in shaping pro-club purchase behavior and in deterring counterfeit demand, offering clear guidance for club merchandising and anti-counterfeit strategies.

*Limitations and future research*

This study used self-reported measures and a cross-sectional correlational research design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships among variables. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as associative rather than causal. In addition, the sample was obtained using snowball sampling and recruitment through students, which may introduce selection bias and limit the representativeness of the research group. As a result, the generalizability of the findings beyond the studied context should be interpreted with caution.

Furthermore, perceived income level was operationalized as a dichotomous variable, which may have reduced variance and statistical power to detect moderation effects; this methodological choice should therefore be considered when interpreting the non-significant interaction results.

Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental research designs to enable causal inference and to more rigorously test the underlying mechanisms, such as perceived value and moral norms, that may mediate the relationship between emotional commitment to the sports team (ECSTS) and counterfeit club product purchase intention (CCPPIS). Furthermore, future studies may enable causal inferences by employing longitudinal and experimental research designs, and through such approaches, cross-market replications can be conducted to examine category-specific effects (e.g., apparel versus accessories), as well as the roles of ethical salience and public versus private consumption contexts in shaping counterfeit purchase intentions.

*Practical implications*

For clubs and rightsholders, the findings point to three main priorities. First, programs that strengthen emotional attachment, such as membership systems, community events, and behind-the-scenes content that help fans feel closer to the team, should be developed. These initiatives help fans identify more strongly with their team and increase their willingness to purchase licensed products. Second, the identity cost of buying counterfeits, including reduced support for the team or a loss of symbolic value, should be clearly communicated. This can help shift purchase decisions from being purely price-based to being grounded in identity and value. Finally, since income level did not make a meaningful difference, anti-counterfeit messages should be

delivered similarly across all income groups, emphasizing belonging and authenticity rather than purely economic deterrents.

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