

## The Semiotic Construction of Authenticity: Analyzing Original Vs Imitation Brands Through Language, Law and Visual Identity

Marryam Naz<sup>1</sup>, Ahsan Mahmood Akbar<sup>2</sup> and Sumayia Tanveer<sup>3</sup>

<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2025.14.2.24>

### Abstract

*Forgery and duplication of brands in Pakistan have given birth to the cultural approval, low prices, and social and financial pressure. This phenomenon has been rooted in throughout the globe. The wee numbers of researches about examining Pakistanis' logos motivated the researcher to conduct a study about them through the lens of symbols. This piece of document focuses on decoding the copying of brands and application of the semiotic mechanisms that effect users' thoughts, and complicate the copyright and patent laws. It aims at the analysis of multi-faceted replicas of footwear, fast food, bakeries, and pharmaceuticals. Qualitative comparative research design combining with semiotic Analysis (Barthes 1977), Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995) via surveys, direct observations, and explicit output testing were harnessed. Data were collected from samples in Faisalabad, Lahore, Chiniot, and other city areas through visiting, purchasing, and visualizing trademarks. Stylo and Stylish (footwear), Layers Bakeshop and Layers Cakeshop (bakery) and Chunk n Cheese and Cheese n Crunch (fast food), and Brufen and Blufen(Pharmaceuticals) were analyzed. The findings showed that their salient features and genres created confusions in their services to their customers.*

**Keywords:** Counterfeit Brands, Semiotics, Trademark Law, Consumer Perception.

### Introduction

This research addresses the issues of counterfeiting of luxury brands. This phenomenon prevails all over the world regardless of the economic status of the countries. well. In 2014, Agence France Press published the details of the Swiss Clock Industry Federation, which seized and destroyed a million fake watches in 2013, that caused an estimated loss of 855 USD. In 2012, Hermes (luggage and clothing brand) was paid 100 million USD fine by the internet sites that sold counterfeit products that were the belongings of Hermes. This phenomenon of forging has been continuously expanding, but the spread of social media made the forgery to snowball. Though these mediums have provided a platform and ample opportunities to the luxury brands to spread their products globally but the social media has made it easier to replicate and forge brands. Counterfeiting primarily targets luxury brands and well-known products. Counterfeiters reproduce the design, logo, and style, but sacrifice quality to make these items more affordable and accessible to people

<sup>1</sup>MPhil (Linguistics) Scholar, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Faisalabad Campus. Email: [Nmasha13@gmail.com](mailto:Nmasha13@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>MPhil (Linguistics) Scholar, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Faisalabad Campus. Email: [Ahsanthabal@gmail.com](mailto:Ahsanthabal@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>MPhil (Linguistics) Scholar, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Faisalabad Campus. Email: [sumayiatanvir@gmail.com](mailto:sumayiatanvir@gmail.com)



who cannot afford genuine luxury goods. Often, cultural pressures influence these consumers to choose cheaper imitations of branded products.

Luxury brands are also confronted to the products that look similar to their own as copycat or look alike of their own items. In US supermarkets, a leader brand's packaging replicated in color, size and shape is found in half of the store's brands. Where the two thirds of the customers are confused by the imitation and one third admit to be fouled by the similar packaging (Satomura, Wedel, & Pieters, 2014). This trend has also reached Pakistan, where both global luxury brands and local products are widely copied and sold rapidly to meet the needs of the general public. These imitations provide affordable access to products that reflect comfort, status, and economy, thus contributing to the local market and boosting the national economy. This study aims to analyze whether these counterfeit brands are here to stay and replace original brands or they are just dopes, just catering to trends and disappear. Although the literature covers the areas of counterfeiting and imitation (Hilton et al., 2004; Lai & Zaichkowsky, 1999; Zaichkowsky, 2006), it also comprehensively defines the forms, characteristics and boundaries of counterfeiting and replication.

This study explores difference between counterfeit and original brands, their origin, social status and their future. Surveys were done and products were tested and compared, on the bases of their designs, store ambiance, packaging, service and menus. This study doesn't just compare the logos and titles but they were thoroughly examined and tested at length to provide a complete comprehensive analysis. It also sheds light on trademark registration, replication freedom, and laws to defend and prevent such theft.

Study intends to investigate how counterfeiting and imitation branding operates in Pakistani consumer market by comparing selected original brands with imitation and local brands across four key sectors: shoe retail, fast food, bakeries and pharmaceuticals. This research aims to critically analyze the linguistic, visual, and semiotic strategies used by replicators to imitate the identity of established brands, and how these strategies deeply influence consumer behavior, trust and purchasing decisions. Furthermore, this study aims to determine whether these imitations are temporary market fillers or they represent a growing cultural acceptance that challenges cultural and traditional ideas of branding and consumer ethics. By examining real-life brands such as chunk n cheese vs. cheese n crunch, layers bakeshop vs. layers cakeshop, brufen vs. blufen, and stylo vs. stylish, this study will offer comprehensive insights into the long-term sustainability and impact of counterfeiting branding in Pakistan's ever growing and evolving market backdrop.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do consumers in Pakistan perceive and differentiate between original and imitation brands in terms of quality, trust, and value?
2. What is the projected future of imitation branding in Pakistan: a persistent market strategy or a fading phenomenon?
3. How do imitation brands in Pakistan visually and linguistically mimic original local brands across the sectors of fast food, bakeries, footwear, and pharmaceuticals?

### **Literature Review**

This literature review refers to the perception of counterfeiting and replication as exact replicas or copies of branded products. Bian and Moutinho (2009) explain that counterfeit brands are those bearing trademarks identical to legally registered brands, emphasizing the deceptive intent of such replication. On the other hand, Lai Zaichkowsky (1999) defines imitations as direct copies that are

usually of inferior or low quality. The concept of replicas is often tied to affordability while some consider replicas unethical, especially those who pay premium prices for authentic products, others view them as economically necessary, providing accessibility to high-end goods that are otherwise out of reach.

Faizullah et al. (2024) investigated semiotic persuasion embedded in Pakistani biscuit packaging in *Semiotics of Deception: A Linguistic Analysis of Packaging Industry in Pakistan*. Using Barthes' Semiotic Theory (1964) and a qualitative approach, they analyzed 100 packaging samples and collected open-ended responses from 200 students. Their analysis of linguistic (slogans, brand names) and visual elements (color, imagery) revealed that packaging creates deceptive brand narratives, misleading consumers. The study expanded Barthes' theory by proposing digital and ethical semiotic dimensions and emphasized the ethical necessity of honest packaging.

A study was conducted in the field of forensic linguistic study on six Pakistani trademarks using Shuy's (2002) framework by Tanveer, Arslan, and Faiz (2024). Their qualitative analysis focused on phonetic and graphemic features, showing that imitation in these aspects leads to confusion and malpractice among consumers. Their findings emphasized the need for legal communicative distinctiveness in branding, highlighting the risks associated with linguistic similarities in trademarks.

A phonetic forensic analysis of Imran Khan's speeches, using Praat software to differentiate between human and AI-generated political speeches based on phonetic features, was studied by Atif, Arslan, and Faiz (2024). They applied a qualitative design, comparing one authentic and one AI-generated speech. The study concluded that AI-generated content had lower phonetic variation but higher intensity, raising concerns about voice authentication in political, legal, and security domains.

Sagheer et al. (2024) conducted a forensic linguistic study titled *A Forensic Linguistic Analysis of Crime Language Used in the Headlines of the Newspaper 'The News International'*. Using a descriptive-qualitative design and grounded in Relevance Theory, they analyzed crime-related headlines. Their findings showed that lexical choices strongly influence public opinion, intensifying emotions like fear or sympathy, and demonstrated the significant role of language in constructing societal perceptions of criminality.

In their research, *A Semiotic Analysis of Multinational Brand Advertisements in Pakistan* Kanwal, Arslan, and Ullah (2024) explored multinational brand advertisements in Pakistan. Applying Barthes' Mythologies through a qualitative design, they examined 10 purposively sampled ads. Their semiotic deconstruction revealed that non-verbal signs such as layout, color, and imagery had a stronger impact than verbal signs in embedding cultural ideologies. The study highlighted how global brands localize emotional and symbolic cues for the Pakistani market.

Ullah et al. (2023) carried out a qualitative semiotic analysis of a single advertisement in *Semiotic Analysis of Zeera Plus Biscuit Advertisement*, using Barthes' connotation denotation model. They examined both verbal elements (slogans, product claims) and non-verbal cues (color, design). Findings indicated that verbal signs slightly outweighed visuals in communicative strength, though both expressed strong cultural messages, making even a single ad a semiotically rich artifact.

A study was conducted on an analysis of flags as cultural icons: a semiotic study of 30 countries, employing Berger and Luckmann's social semiotics and Saussure's signifier-signified model (Shakeel et al., 2023). Using random sampling and a qualitative method, they deconstructed 30 national flags. The study concluded that flags serve as ideological signs, reflecting national identity, historical narratives, and sociopolitical values, thereby functioning as powerful cultural texts.

As Tanveer et al. (2024) later emphasized, phonetic and graphemic mimicry is not merely a stylistic issue it creates real-world legal confusion and consumer manipulation. Their work urges for clearer legal frameworks to protect both brand identity and consumer rights from semiotic deception.

Wilcox et al. (2009), condemns counterfeit products as illegal, low-priced and lower quality replicas of the brands that possess high brand value. Counterfeit has many names like copycats, imitations, and replicas, look alike or me-too products. Me-too products are those products that look identical to other branded products but are not completely identical. These recognize themselves as replicates but a slight different version. Me-too brands consists of electronics, food, medicine and fashion.

Whereas Balabanis and Craven (1997), define these replicates and imitations as lookalikes and a new generation of budget-conscious products that have packaging and characteristics same as the leading brands products. Though some products are better than the others but they lack innovation and productivity of the original brands.

The different levels of counterfeiting at length as explained by Zaichkowsky (2006) . He considers it much more than just a homogenous category. It contains several levels and forms, such as trademark (brand logo), trade-dress (shape, design and colours), or just few of its elements. And the difference between counterfeit and imitation is explained as, counterfeit is a fraudulent copy and imitation is a copy that may or may not intend to deceive. The cues that allow to identify a fake from its original is through many cues. The cues such as place, price and quality of purchase and its performance. Similarity is a necessary condition for imitation strategy (Faizo, 1986).

Howard et al. (2000) analyze semiotics and similar sounding names versus similar meaning names. He finds a significant impact on brand confusion on the consumers. How imitations are sold after few years of the release of original product. And how common people are compromised due to lack of information and branding on the social media. By recalling the advertisements of specific brand prints and design, replicas are sold to the innocent people who don't have access to high end brands.

Van Horen and Pieters (2012a) successfully distinguished between two types of imitation and similarities: literal and semantic. Literal similarity is solely based on the consumer's evaluation of the brand and its common characteristics, such as spellings, number of common letters or similar sequence of the letters. On the other hand semantics deal with the copied attributes. This research also shows that though people have insecurities regarding counterfeiting but they show feasibility towards imitations and replicas because of their affordability and Me-Too status.

As Aaker (1991), explored in his research of counterfeiting and imitation that brands has different concepts. According to law "A brand is a set of distinctive signs that represent property. Registration or constant use allows for the protection of these distinctive signs." So the propriety issue of a brand strictly adheres to the protection and individuality of the brand. Copyrights are strictly respected and followed in the western countries but in Pakistan, just because it is an under developed country, the rule of law is not strictly followed and applied.

Milgram (1970) proposed that the popularity of replicas and lookalikes aligns simultaneously with the urban overload theory. Where consumers are bombarded with brands, visuals and sales pitches that it makes harder to discern authentic products to counterfeit ones. In such overstimulated environments, consumers develop cognitive sifters and rely on shorthand markers such as logos and taglines to navigate through their choices (Simion & Ruth 1998). This increase vulnerability to brand mimicry, specifically when visual similarity is high and prices are comparatively low.

Latané and Darley's (1968, 1970) concept of bystander indecisiveness further supports this, where oversaturation and media exhaustion reduce consumer impulse to investigate authenticity while intensifying passive need for acceptance of replicas. Imitation is not just a commercial act rather a culturally mediated strategy. Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of cultural norms help to build an understanding of how and why brand authenticity is valued in some cultures but replication is also acceptable in other cultures as well. For instance, Maheswaran (1994) and Bilkey and Nes (1982) debate that country-of-origin (COO) greatly effects and shape brand perception through cultural schemas, making certain copied products more acceptable and trusted depending on their perceived origin.

All the discussion brings us to one question: is it socially legitimate to counterfeit brands? Answer to this question is found in, Aaker's (1991) statement that how western markets strictly enforce copyright and intellectual property laws whereas underdeveloped regions such as Pakistan lack enforcement mechanisms. The major purpose of counterfeiting in Pakistan is not deception rather economic necessity and status aspiration. In Pakistan the status of replica as "affordable alternatives" shifts the narrative from fraud to feasibility, manifesting a linguistic and ideological space where such products and brands are normalized rather than stigmatized.

Lastly, critical discourse scholars such as Peterson (2001) and Bailey and Pomerantz (2001) call for investigation in how branding practices influence consumer behavior. This comprises to false ethical claims, co-branding tactics, and semiotic plagiarizing all of which may reflect deeper power structures implanted in commercial language. The rise of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in branding therefore reflects an effort to unpack the symbolic violence and hegemonic ideologies concealed by aesthetic demand and corporate narratives. This research tends to view imitation and counterfeiting as semiotic and ethical battleground, where cultural context, visual resonance and consumer convergence is highlighted for a better understanding.

### **Brands' Perception about Real and Fake**

Consumers in Pakistan often struggle to differentiate between original and imitation brands particularly when brand names, logos, and product genres are deceptively similar. The case analysis of Stylo vs Stylish (footwear), Layers Bakeshop vs Layers Cakeshop (bakery), Chunk n Cheese vs Cheese n Crunch (fast food), and Brufen vs Blufen (pharmaceuticals) reveals four key patterns in how Pakistani consumers perceive these brands in terms of quality, trust, value, and confusion due to brand similarity.

1. *Quality*: Most consumers associate the original brands (Stylo, Layers Bakeshop, Chunk n Cheese, Brufen) with better quality due to longer market presence, consistent branding, and customer reviews. However, imitative brands (Stylish, Layers Cakeshop, Cheese n Crunch, Blufen) often create initial confusion by mimicking packaging or store layout, leading less-informed consumers to assume comparable quality.
2. *Trust*: Trust is primarily built over time through consistent service, recognizable branding, and word-of-mouth. Brufen, for instance, has long been trusted in the pharmaceutical market, while Blufen often sparks mistrust due to unfamiliarity or spelling discrepancy. Similarly, Stylo commands more trust than Stylish, especially among loyal customers who are wary of counterfeits.
3. *Value*: In terms of perceived value, consumers often see the original brands as offering better returns on investment. They are willing to pay slightly more for Layers Bakeshop or Chunk n Cheese because of perceived hygiene, taste, and customer service. Imitative brands may offer

cheaper alternatives, but customers frequently express dissatisfaction after use or consumption, reinforcing the belief that the original brand gives better value.

4. *Brand Confusion and Genre Overlap*: The greatest issue lies in brand confusion caused by name similarity and overlapping product genres. Many customers report mistakenly entering a Layers Cakeshop instead of Layers Bakeshop, expecting the same taste and quality but facing disappointment. This confusion is exacerbated in lower-literacy or fast-paced settings like crowded markets. In pharmaceuticals, Blufen being sold beside Brufen in less regulated stores creates serious concerns over health and safety.

### **Projected Future: Persistent Strategy**

Imitation branding in Pakistan is likely to remain a persistent market strategy rather than a fading phenomenon. This trend is sustained by weak enforcement of trademark laws, gaps in regulatory frameworks, and a general lack of brand literacy among consumers. Until strong legislative action and public awareness campaigns are implemented, imitation brands will continue to exploit the popularity of originals to gain consumer trust deceptively.

### **Visual and Linguistic Mimicry by Sector**

#### **Footwear: Stylo vs Stylish**

Stylish mimics Stylo using a similar name structure, logo styling, and storefront design. The name 'Stylish' plays off Stylo's fashion appeal, confusing buyers who rely on visual cues or store location memory.

#### **Bakery: Layers Bakeshop vs Layers Cakeshop**

The name similarity is exact enough to trick walk-in customers. Layers Cakeshop copies menu names, layout designs, and flavor descriptions. Both adopt Westernized aesthetics and upscale bakery atmospheres, making them visually interchangeable at a glance.

#### **Fast Food: Chunk n Cheese vs Cheese n Crunch**

The brands mimic one another through word arrangement and alliteration. Both use bright red-yellow branding, cheesy cartoon mascots, and identical food categories like burgers, fries, and cheese-stuffed items. Even social media pages often replicate each other's visuals and wording.

#### **Pharmaceuticals: Brufen vs Blufen**

The mimicry here is dangerous. Blufen copies Brufen's font, color, and packaging shape. The phonetic closeness is so strong that patients and even some less-trained pharmacists may mistake one for the other—posing serious health hazards. Imitation brands in Pakistan often employ strategic visual and linguistic mimicry to closely resemble established local brands. This approach leverages consumer familiarity and trust associated with the original brands, potentially leading to confusion and inadvertent patronage of the imitators. Let's examine specific examples across various sectors:

#### **Footwear: Stylo vs. Stylish**

1. *Stylo*: A well-established Pakistani footwear brand known for its trendy designs and vibrant color schemes.
2. *Stylish*: An imitation brand that closely mirrors Stylo's name, differing by only a few letters.

**Mimicry Tactics**

1. *Linguistic*: The name "Stylish" is phonetically and visually similar to "Stylo," potentially causing confusion among consumers.
2. *Visual*: Stylish may adopt similar logo designs, color palettes, and store layouts to those of Stylo, further blurring brand distinctions.

**Bakery: Layers Bakeshop vs. Layers Cakeshop**

1. *Layers Bakeshop*: A popular bakery chain in Pakistan, recognized for its distinctive branding and quality products.
2. *Layers Cakeshop*: An imitation entity that replicates the original brand's name and aesthetic.

**Mimicry Tactics**

1. *Linguistic*: The addition of "Cake" in place of "Bake" maintains the brand's rhythm and familiarity.
2. *Visual*: Layers Cakeshop may utilize similar typography, color schemes, and packaging designs to those of Layers Bakeshop, aiming to capitalize on the latter's established reputation.

**Fast Food: Chunk n Cheese vs. Cheese n Crunch**

1. *Chunk n Cheese*: A fast-food brand offering a variety of cheesy dishes.
2. *Cheese n Crunch*: An imitator with a name that rearranges the original brand's components.

**Mimicry Tactics**

1. *Linguistic*: The rearrangement of words maintains a similar phonetic appeal, potentially leading to brand confusion.
2. *Visual*: Cheese n Crunch may adopt comparable menu designs, signage, and promotional materials to those of Chunk n Cheese.

**Pharmaceuticals: Brufen vs. Blufen**

1. *Brufen*: A well-known brand of ibuprofen, widely used for pain relief.
2. *Blufen*: An imitation brand that closely resembles the original in name and packaging.

**Mimicry Tactics**

1. *Linguistic*: The name "Blufen" differs from "Brufen" by only one letter, which can easily be overlooked, especially in handwritten prescriptions.
2. *Visual*: Blufen's packaging may mimic Brufen's color schemes, font styles, and layout, increasing the likelihood of consumer confusion.

**Research Methodology****Research Design**

This research adopts a qualitative comparative analysis approach, integrating semiotic analysis, consumer perception surveys, field observation, and direct product comparison testing. The primary objective is to explore how counterfeit or imitation brands operate and how they are received by Pakistani consumers across different market sectors.

**Population and Sampling**

Four key sectors were selected for this study: fast food, footwear, bakery, and pharmaceuticals. Within each sector, a pair of brands, an original and a counterfeit—was identified based on visual

and linguistic similarities, market availability, and consumer familiarity. The selected pairs included Chunk n Cheese and Cheese n Crust in fast food; Stylo Shoes and Stylish Shoes in footwear; Layers Bakeshop and Layers Cakeshop in bakery; and Brufen (GSK) and Blufen in pharmaceuticals.

### **Data Collection Method**

Data was collected through multiple methods. Surveys were conducted among attentive consumer groups to gather insights on brand recognition, preferences, confusion, and ethical attitudes toward imitation brands. Field visits were carried out in Faisalabad and surrounding urban areas to observe branding elements such as store design, product packaging, pricing, and visual appearance. Products were also directly purchased from both original and counterfeit brands to enable comparative analysis based on taste (for food), material and design (for footwear), and packaging features. Additionally, visual documentation including photographs and screenshots of logos, advertisements, and store layouts was compiled for further analysis.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

A combination of semiotic and discourse analysis was used, following frameworks by Barthes (1977) and Kress & van Leeuwen (1996). This allowed for detailed examination of visual signifiers such as logos, color schemes, layouts, and the linguistic mimicry found in brand names and slogans. Consumer behavior analysis was conducted through the survey data, focusing on brand trust, satisfaction, and awareness of imitation branding, ethical views, and experiences of confusion during purchase decisions. Comparative product testing was performed to assess quality differences in sensory (taste and feel) and material aspects.

### **Legal and Cultural Contextual Review**

A brief legal and cultural overview was conducted to contextualize the research. Relevant legislation includes the Trade Marks Ordinance, 2001, which regulates trademark registration and protection; the IPO Act, 2012, under which the Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan (IPO-Pakistan) operates; the Competition Act, 2010, enforced by the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP); and the DRAP Act, 2012, which governs pharmaceutical branding. In addition to legal texts, cultural attitudes toward counterfeit branding were explored through the works of Hassan (2021) and Ahmed (2020), emphasizing affordability and consumer pragmatism in Pakistani society.

### **Real-Life Cases and Crackdowns**

Several recent enforcement actions illustrate the practical challenges of regulating imitation branding in Pakistan. In 2023, Punjab's Special Branch conducted raids in Lahore's markets, seizing thousands of counterfeit shoes imitating brands like Stylo, Bata, and Service. Similarly, in 2022, DRAP cracked down on illegal pharmaceutical manufacturers in Lahore and Faisalabad producing fake painkillers such as Blufen, a mimic of Brufen (GSK). IPO-Pakistan reported in 2021–2022 that numerous local bakeries were using unauthorized variations of the "Layers" brand, leading to confusion. Though warnings and minor penalties were issued, most counterfeiters quickly rebranded with minimal changes to evade prosecution. In 2020, the CCP issued notices to fast food outlets copying brand names and menu styles, labeling these acts as violations of Section 10 of the Competition Act, which addresses misleading marketing.

### Challenges in Enforcement

Despite having a comprehensive legal framework, enforcement in Pakistan faces multiple obstacles. Regulatory bodies such as IPO-Pakistan and DRAP are under-resourced and lack sufficient field staff to monitor markets effectively. Consumer awareness about intellectual property rights and brand authenticity is low, particularly in lower-income groups. Penalties for offenders are often lenient, leading to frequent reoffending with slight adjustments in branding. Furthermore, a cultural tolerance for imitation persists in Pakistan's price-sensitive market, where affordability is often prioritized over brand loyalty or ethical concerns. Consequently, imitation branding continues to thrive, especially in sectors where consumers are more focused on accessibility than authenticity.

**Figure 1: Stylo vs. Stylish Shoes**



Stylo Shoes, now a prominent national brand in Pakistan, traces its origins back to the 1970s when it was launched as *Bano Shoes*. It later grew into *Style*, and eventually rebranded as *Stylo* in 2002. Primarily a single-shop business, Stylo expanded aggressively, specifically post-2000, launching its headquarters in Lahore and building a retail empire catering primarily to women's footwear and bridal fashion. Today, Stylo runs more than 140 outlets across the country, sustained by a dynamic digital existence and trademark protection under the IPO Pakistan registry (IPO Pakistan, 2020). Instead, Stylish Shoes, a lesser-known regional brand based in Faisalabad, started set-up independently in 1995 under the label *Style*, about the same time Stylo was still on the rise in Lahore and had not yet arrived in the Faisalabad arcade. The owner of Stylish started by sourcing shoes from the same factories in Lahore that supplied Stylo, ECS, and Comely, selling high-quality products to a local business.

Despite its modest start, Stylish grew gradually and established its second flagship store in D-Ground Plaza, a significant commercial zone in Faisalabad. The brand gained a reputation for offering sturdy and comfortable shoes, especially high heels with non-slip sole, which many customers considered superior to Stylo's in terms of comfort and endurance. Unlike Stylo, Stylish never extended outside its locality, though it did formalize its tactics through trademark registration but lacked digital marketing. As a result, in spite of being a strong and devoted customer base, including customers from overseas, Stylish struggled with operational costs, import taxes, and a collapsing economy. The deficit of financial and legal fortifications, compounded by swelling production costs and dearth of scalability, ultimately forced the brand into closure, with its proprietor now planning to relocate to Saudi Arabia.

From a semiotic outlook, using Roland Barthes' (1977) theory, brands are seen as sign patterns that express cultural mythologies and consumer standards. Stylo, through its pink, floral-themed logo, refined glass-fronted stores, and bridal promotions, builds the saga of affordable femininity and metropolitan fashion. Its use of semiotics is thoughtful and sophisticated, aligning its merchandise with marks of beauty, class, and occasion-based fashion. Stylish, although regionally embedded, encompassed many of the same visual cues, such as a parallel pink color palette, typography, and store arrangement, suggesting a thoughtful attempt to resonate Stylo's semiotic individuality. These visual connections go beyond coincidence, signifying semiotic imitation proposed to trigger recognition and sustenance among consumers, a common practice among fake brands as noted by Zaichkowsky (2006).

Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, as theorized by Fairclough (1995), Stylo builds a discourse of modernity, charisma, and brand loyalty, placing itself as a national groundbreaker in women's fashion footwear. In contrast, Stylish discourse is on the localized side, devoted to product sturdiness and consumer relationships rather than image. Nevertheless, the absence of professional branding and publicizing, rendered Stylish obscure in the broader consumer discourse, showing how power and distinction in consumer culture are often determined by discourse access and digital existence.

Legally, Pakistan's Trademark Ordinance 2000 safeguards registered brand identities, including names, logos, and trade dress. Stylo, as a registered trademark under IPO Pakistan, relishes protection against replication. Stylish, though registered its name but faced legal difficulties in logo design. Although it started independently and earlier than Stylo's entrance into the Faisalabad arcade, its later use of parallel brand elements particularly after Stylo's national reputation, places it in a gray area among *inspired* and *infringing*. As observed in IPO enforcement actions and recent trademark crackdowns (IPO Pakistan, 2022), such similarities are increasingly scrutinized, especially when the original brand holds clear registration and market presence.

In conclusion, while Stylish Shoes was not established as an imitation and even predates Stylo's local maneuvers in Faisalabad, the convergence of visual identity, logo design, and brand cues over time align it with what Barthes (1977) would describe as *myth replication*. Stylish's collapse echoes the vulnerability of unregistered and localized brands in Pakistan's increasingly formalized market economy, where trademark law, branding power, and consumer discourse regulate long-term sustainability.

**Table 1: Comparison of footwear categories**

| Category                      | Stylo Shoes                                                                        | Stylish Shoes                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Founding &amp; History</b> | Originated as Bano Shoes in the 1970s; rebranded as Stylo and expanded nationally. | Founded in 1995 in Faisalabad as "Style"; began as a local retail outlet sourcing branded shoes. |
| <b>Brand Identity</b>         | National-level brand with glamorous bridal, formal, and casual collections.        | Regional/local brand offering similar styles, focusing on durability and affordability.          |
| <b>Logo &amp; Name Design</b> | Registered brand name and logo using stylized font in pink/purple tones.           | Initially unique, but later adopted a nearly identical logo and name to Stylo.                   |
| <b>Target Audience</b>        | Middle and upper-middle-class women across Pakistan.                               | Loyal regional customer base from Faisalabad; more working-class and middle-income.              |
| <b>Product Quality</b>        | Emphasis on fashion trends, aesthetics, and wide variety.                          | Known for durable heels and comfortable casual wear; limited fashion diversity.                  |

|                                      |                                                                                                |                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Business Scale</b>                | Over 140 outlets, active e-commerce, and digital presence.                                     | One or two physical stores; no digital or online infrastructure.                          |
| <b>Legal Status</b>                  | Registered under IPO Pakistan; brand trademark protected.                                      | Unregistered, legally vulnerable due to identical logo and name usage.                    |
| <b>Visual ‘Branding (Semiotics)’</b> | Vibrant and feminine design; visual discourse of glamour and urban femininity (Barthes, 1977). | Imitates Stylo's semiotic codes, font, and color—constructs a borrowed identity.          |
| <b>Marketing Strategy</b>            | Active campaigns, influencer collaborations, bridal collections, seasonal sales.               | No major marketing strategy; relies on word-of-mouth and visual similarity.               |
| <b>Customer Perception</b>           | Seen as trendy, elite, and desirable by a large national base.                                 | Considered durable and practical by local customers but confused with Stylo by outsiders. |
| <b>Legal/Ethical Concern</b>         | Fully protected; clear brand identity.                                                         | Operates in a legal grey zone, potentially infringing IPO Pakistan’s trademark laws.      |

**Figure 2: Layers bakeshop vs. layers cakeshop**



Layers Bakeshop is an impressively recognized exceptional dessert brand that originated in Islamabad and swiftly gained recognition across major cities like Lahore, Karachi, and Faisalabad. It is famous for its rich, dense cakes, signature sundaes, and minimalistic yet well-designed packaging that mirrors modern culinary aesthetics. The brand uses tasteful naming treaties (e.g., Triple Chocolate Fudge, Belgian Bliss) and wisely curated interior design, that Barthes (1977) would call a mythology of indulgence and refinement. Its branding focuses on simple composition, gentle pastel palettes, and a visual identity that merely aligns with international bakery standards. Through social media and influencer partnerships, Layers builds a discourse of aspirational taste and conventional mobility (Fairclough, 1995).

In contrast, Layers Cakeshop, a small unregistered business in Chiniot, directly plagiarizes the logo, color schema, product varieties, and even store name of the original Layers Bakeshop while changing it to cakeshop in an attempt to build its unique identity. However formal branding registration, social media marketing, or nationwide recognition is currently absent because the goal of the owner is to target the two cities' rural masses who are unaware of the original brand and are new to such delicacies. Its cakes, though light, and refreshing while visually inspired by Layers, are less dense, more aerated, and do not replicate the original taste, density or consistency. Interestingly, the imitation brand charges even higher prices, likely exploiting consumer ignorance

or misidentification. This mimics what Zaichkowsky (2006) describes as intentional brand mimicry to exploit symbolic brand capital without investing in original innovation. The semiotic elements are where the counterfeit becomes more obvious: Layers Cake Shop uses the same “dripping layers” logo motif, similar product names, and packaging that meticulously resembles that of Layers Bakeshop. The imitation is limited, as not all menu items are copied possibly due to the startup nature of the business. Still, the imitation of characteristic markers like font, cake naming, and visual style functions to blur consumer insight, creating what Barthes would define as a connotative redundancy, a visual sign directing to prestige without actually delivering it.

From a critical discourse perspective, the original Layers Bakeshop constructs a narrative of luxury, and sophisticated lifestyle, while the counterfeit version uses those same linguistic and visual enigmas to create legitimacy without social resistance or scale. The discourse around quality is diluted in the imitation brand, and consumer satisfaction differs significantly. This could deceive consumers and dilute the original brand's equity over time, particularly in areas where the official brand has no reputable presence.

Legally, Layers Cakeshop violates multiple aspects of Pakistan’s Trade Marks Ordinance (2000) by copying trade dress, naming, and overall visual identity without registration or agreement. According to IPO Pakistan, businesses that counterfeit registered brands can face restrictions, brand confiscation, or fines under anti-counterfeiting laws (IPO Pakistan, 2023). However, in smaller towns like Chiniot, lack of administration allows such businesses to operate liberally, highlighting the gap between legal frameworks and practical regulation in rural or peri-urban economies.

Figure 3: Bakery shop comparisons



Table 2: Comparison of bakery categories

| Aspects                | Layers Bakeshop                                                                                                                                        | Layers Cakeshop                                                                                                    |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Origin & Establishment | Founded in Islamabad, Layers Bakeshop is a registered, nationwide dessert chain known for premium-quality cakes and desserts. Established around 2020. | Appeared in smaller cities like Chiniot after Layers Bakeshop gained popularity. Unregistered and locally managed. |
| Branding & Logo        | Uses minimalist, elegant fonts with black and gold/white themes; heavily marketed on social media.                                                     | Copies the exact logo design, color palette, and shop layout, creating consumer confusion.                         |
| Product Range          | Specializes in rich chocolate fudge cakes, Lotus cheesecakes, brownies, cookies, and celebration cakes.                                                | Offers similar-looking cakes but often lacks consistency in taste and ingredients. Limited innovation.             |

|                                 |                                                                                           |                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Quality &amp; Taste</b>      | Highly rated for moist texture, rich ingredients, and consistent quality across branches. | Mixed reviews: low density, refreshing and on the lighter note                                          |
| <b>Customer Experience</b>      | Instagrammable interiors, polite service, online ordering systems, and loyalty programs.  | Basic service, less polished interiors, no digital systems, and cash-only service.                      |
| <b>Marketing &amp; Presence</b> | Strong digital presence with influencer marketing and national expansion.                 | Mostly offline marketing through banners and local promotions; limited or no digital footprint.         |
| <b>Legal Status</b>             | Registered under IPO Pakistan with intellectual property protection.                      | Operates in legal gray area; mimics brand identity, potentially violating IPO Pakistan's trademark law. |
| <b>User Reviews</b>             | Positive: "Delicious cakes, great ambiance, a must-try dessert bar."                      | Mixed: "Looks like Layers but not the same taste. Presentation is okay, but cakes feel dry."            |
| <b>Current Market Position</b>  | Rapidly expanding with branches in major cities; brand recognized nationwide.             | Confined to specific localities; relies on confusion for sales rather than brand value.                 |

**Figure 4: Chunk n cheese Vs. Cheese n Crunch Vs. Crunch n Cheese**



Chunk n Cheese is a Lahore-based exceptional fast food brand that arose as a trendy, youth-centric eating place offering burgers, pizzas, and loaded fries with American-style aesthetics and gourmet recipes. Known for its metropolitan branding, graffiti-style décor, and digital publicizing campaigns, the brand quickly became preferred among academia students and families in Lahore. It uses lively fonts, graffiti-style logo, and catchy menu names to build a discourse of indulgence, legitimacy, and cosmopolitanism. Its marketing language, menu design, and interior aesthetics present what Barthes (1977) would call a myth of modern taste culture, appealing to consumers seeking an elevated fast-food experience.

In contrast, Cheese n Crunch, a small-scale imitation brand located in the outskirts of Punjab (Chiniot), mimics many visual and linguistic cues of Chunk n Cheese. The logo uses similar font styles with cheese-drip imagery, the color scheme is nearly identical (yellow, white and blue

tones), and the menu includes replicas such as crunchy burger, loaded fries, cheese bursts, and a special identical to chunk n cheese special. However, Cheese n Crunch lacks the production excellence, menu variation, and brand refinement of Chunk n Cheese. Though it tries to mimic chunk n cheese in all possible ways but their bread in pizza and rolls are slightly dry and wings are over-cooked lacking original's juiciness and freshness. Its interior décor is modest, and a mixture of two fast food joints, signature artificial plants, partition of fork n knives and signature yellow lights and woodwork theme of chunk n cheese. Prices are slightly lower in terms of individual product but higher in terms of deals, targeting budget-conscious local clients who may or may not distinguish the difference between original and imitation. This echoes Zaichkowsky's (2006) view that imitation brands often leverage consumer confusion or familiarity to insert themselves into competitive markets.

Crunch n Cheese, located in Faisalabad, functions as a mid-tier imitation with a little more organized branding than Cheese n Crunch. While still plagiarizing heavily from Chunk n Cheese in terms of visual distinctiveness and menu styling, it sustains a more steadfast merchandise offering. Consumer reviews (e.g., Foodpanda, 2024) propose adequate satisfaction, especially with items like BBQ Fries and CNC Loaded Sandwich, although some objections exist concerning service speed and hygiene. Its aesthetic is closer to a fusion setup, and the menu includes Creamy Pasta, Tower Burgers, and Chocolate Lava desserts, marking an insignificant divergence into product innovation while sustaining imitative brand codes. Barthes' (1977) framework would categorize this as partial connotative mimicry, where meaning is borrowed and remodeled to produce a new localized narrative of indulgence.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perception (Fairclough, 1995), Chunk n Cheese builds an urban, elite food discourse through its Instagram marketing, influencer collaborations, and hashtags that rejoice lifestyle and food intricacy. Cheese n Crunch, The restaurant maintains an active presence on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, where they share updates, promotions, and engage with customers. Cheese n Crunch celebrated its first anniversary recently, marking a year of serving the Chiniot community with its fast-food offerings. Its discourse focuses on quantity and affordability, signifying a shift in semiotic weight from gourmet to filling and cheap—a pragmatic variation rather than ethical branding.

Legally, Cheese n Crunch operates in a gray area and crunch n cheese in the main urban area. Although both may not have registered as a formal business or trademark with IPO Pakistan, but closely resembles Chunk n Cheese in name, menu, and visual identity, which potentially violates Pakistan's Trademarks Ordinance (2000). As seen in actual crackdowns on identical counterfeit and imitation brands in the food and fashion industries (IPO Pakistan, 2022), such cases are increasingly subject to legal action, especially when the original brand is registered and operating at a national level.

Despite its imitation, Cheese n Crunch and Crunch n Cheese are not a full copycat but a partial mimic of what Barthes might describe as connotative borrowing rather than full denotation. It borrows the prestige and appeal of the original brand's identity but tailors it to local market needs: affordability, accessibility, and recognizability. This aligns with trends in Pakistan's informal food economy, where intellectual property laws are often overlooked in favor of market survival strategies. Despite their similarities, these brands represent different levels of imitation:

- Chunk n Cheese is the original visionary with a strong semiotic presence and elite discourse.
- Cheese n Crunch is a high-fidelity mimic lacking quality or originality.
- Crunch n Cheese is a moderate mimic, offering selective differentiation while leveraging the original's identity.

**Figure 5: Chunk and Cheese identity****Table 3: Comparison of fast food categories**

| Features           | Chunk n Cheese (Original)                                 | Cheese n Crunch (Imitation)                            | Crunch n Cheese (Third Brand)                      |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Location           | Lahore (Gulberg, DHA, Johar Town)                         | Sheikhupura / Chiniot                                  | Gujranwala (Main Branch), expanding in small towns |
| Trademark Status   | Registered                                                | Unregistered                                           | Unknown (appears unregistered)                     |
| Menu Highlights    | Chunk Special Burger, Loaded Fries, Jalapeño Pizza, Wings | CnC Special Burger, Cheesy Fries, Cheese Bursts, Wings | Crunch Beast Burger, Chilli Fries, Cheddar Pizza   |
| Price Range        | Mid to High (Rs. 600–1200 per meal)                       | Rs. 450–800 (individual), higher in deals              | Low to Mid (Rs. 350–950)                           |
| Food Quality       | Gourmet, consistent, juicy wings                          | Mixed reviews: dry buns, overcooked wings              | Average quality, oily pizzas                       |
| Visual Identity    | Graffiti walls, cheese-drip logo, yellow & black theme    | Copied font, yellow-white-blue, artificial plants      | Generic, orange-red, no visual language            |
| Ambiance           | Urban, trendy, Instagram-friendly                         | Hybrid décor from other brands                         | Basic seating, minimal decor                       |
| Marketing Strategy | Instagram, influencers, hashtags                          | Facebook, pamphlets, Foodpanda                         | Word-of-mouth, posters                             |

| Customer Base      | Urban youth, families                 | Small-town families, teens       | Students, budget-conscious youth            |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Customer Reviews   | ☆☆☆☆½ – Creative & flavorful          | ☆☆½ – Okay but criticized        | ☆☆ – Value for money, lacks variety         |
| Menu Creativity    | Original recipes & sauces             | Copied names and items           | Standard items, some borrowed names         |
| Legal Standing     | Fully compliant with IPO              | Potential trademark infringement | Likely in violation if similar design       |
| Semiotic Strategy  | Urban fast food myth (Barthes)        | Connotative borrowing (Barthes)  | Creates familiarity without unique identity |
| Discourse Strategy | Elite lifestyle language (Fairclough) | Deals & affordability focus      | 'Quantity over quality' message             |

**Figure 6: Brufen vs. Blufen: A Semiotic, Legal, and Market-Based Comparison**



Brufen, an internationally recognized merchandise produced by Abbott Laboratories, is a commonly prescribed Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug (NSAID), known for its effectiveness in treatment pain and inflammation. Its active ingredient, Ibuprofen, is trusted internationally and manufactured under strict pharmaceutical standards. Brufen's branding features a clinical, minimalistic strategy with consistent packaging that communicates consistency, safety, and scientific legitimacy. Its name is phonetically meek and familiar to patients, creating what Barthes (1977) would term a "myth" of medical efficacy—a semiotic narrative that embeds Brufen as a symbol of standard medical care in public perception.

Blufen, on the other hand, is a domestic pharmaceutical product that impersonates Brufen's phonetic structure and visual packaging. However, it comprises an entirely diverse formulation: Aceclofenac (100mg) + Paracetamol (325mg) + Thiocolchicoside (250mg), normally used as a muscle relaxant and pain reliever. In spite of the diverse pharmacodynamics, Blufen uses blue-coated tablets, a parallel blister style, and an almost identical trademark, evidently designed to mislead less-informed customers or pharmacists who may associate the brand with Brufen. This practice supports Zaichkowsky's (2006) concept of "look-alike brands", where phonetic and visual mimicry is used to transfer brand equity through deception.

From a semiotic lens, Blufen employs connotative imitation, plagiarizing the trust linked with Brufen rather than proposing genuine equivalence. Barthes (1977) might argue that the symbolic purpose of the name and packaging of Brufen has been recontextualized by Blufen to project a fabricated sense of therapeutic equivalency. This not only builds consumer confusion but poses

significant health risks if the patient takes an unintended medication formulation—a violation of informed medical practice standards.

Applying Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), we can see that Brufen is placed in the discourse of international pharmacological reliability, while Blufen recontextualizes this verbal trust and science into a local, affordability-centered narrative. Blufen's discourse centers on being a "strong pain killer" at a lower value, endorsed mainly through pharmacy-level advertising rather than consumer-facing advertising suggestive of resource-limited, informal discourse circulation common in many Global South pharmaceutical markets.

Legally, this constitutes a direct violation of Pakistan's Trade Marks Ordinance (2000) and raises substantial ethical concerns under the WHO's guidelines on substandard and falsified medical products (2017). Although Blufen is not essentially a fake drug in terms of content (i.e., it comprises active pharmaceutical elements), it is a misbranded product using the reputability and enterprise of a medically trusted brand to create market presence. As IPO Pakistan (2023) has acknowledged in various crackdowns against counterfeit pharmaceuticals, such practices challenge drug safety and regulatory struggles in Pakistan's already crumbling healthcare system. Despite its legitimacy and ethical inadequacies, Blufen represents a common trend in low-income pharmaceutical markets: survival via strategic mimicry. It exploits the consumer's perception of similarity while offering an entirely different product, a dangerous, yet pervasive form of trademark or brand imitation that thrives in regulatory loopholes and areas of low health literacy. In conclusion, the Brufen vs. Blufen comparison demonstrates a complex interplay between branding semiotics, regulatory negligence, and consumer psychology. Unlike food or fashion, pharmaceutical imitation involves life-threatening risks and requires more crucial legal and public health mediations. As Zaichkowsky (2006) and WHO (2017) emphasize, the intellectual property laws must not only protect brands but also safeguard consumer health, particularly in markets where brand names often carry the full weight of trust and perceived efficacy.

**Table 4: Comparison of Pharmaceutical categories**

| Features             | Brufen                                                   | Blufen                                                                                          |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Manufacturer         | Abbott Laboratories                                      | Local Pakistani pharmaceutical companies (varies by region; often unregistered)                 |
| Year Introduced      | Globally in 1960s; Pakistan since 1970s                  | Approx. post-2010; expanded in local markets with various formulations                          |
| Composition          | Ibuprofen (200–600 mg/tablet)                            | Aceclofenac (100 mg) + Paracetamol (325 mg) + Thiocolchicoside (250 mg)                         |
| Drug Class           | NSAID (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug)             | NSAID + Analgesic + Muscle Relaxant                                                             |
| Intended Use         | Pain, inflammation, arthritis                            | Muscular pain, spasms, back pain, joint issues                                                  |
| Branding & Packaging | Branded, globally consistent; purple/white blister packs | Imitates Brufen's name; similar blister style, different composition; varying blue/orange packs |
| Trademark Status     | Registered Trademark (IPO Pakistan, 2023)                | Often unregistered; name and packaging similarity falls under trademark infringement concerns   |
| Semiotic Strategy    | Scientific, trustworthy, global legacy (Barthes, 1977)   | Mimics Brufen semiotically for trust, using name similarity and similar packaging               |
| Marketing Language   | Emphasizes safety, doctor-recommended                    | Relies on name recall and market familiarity rather than unique branding                        |

|                         |                                                                      |                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Price Range (per strip) | PKR 30–60                                                            | PKR 20–50 depending on region and vendor                                                               |
| Efficacy (User Reviews) | Reliable, fewer side effects, fast action (urban pharmacies, forums) | Reported effective for short-term relief but more fatigue/drowsiness (user reviews from rural clinics) |
| Common Side Effects     | Gastric upset, nausea, kidney strain (rare with proper use)          | Drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, and in some cases allergic reactions due to muscle relaxant component   |
| Controversies           | None specific; widely used safely                                    | Confusion due to name similarity with Brufen; occasional regulatory warnings in medical forums         |
| Legal Risk (Trademark)  | Fully protected                                                      | Falls under phonetic similarity and semiotic imitation; violates IPO Pakistan Trademark Ordinance      |
| Distribution Channels   | Registered pharmacies, hospitals, global distribution                | Local pharmacies, clinics, occasionally unlicensed distributors                                        |

### Brands' Perception about Real and Fake

Consumers in Pakistan often struggle to differentiate between original and imitation brands particularly when brand names, logos, and product genres are deceptively similar. The case analysis of Stylo vs Stylish (footwear), Layers Bakeshop vs Layers Cakeshop (bakery), Chunk n Cheese vs Cheese n Crunch (fast food), and Brufen vs Blufen (pharmaceuticals) reveals four key patterns in how Pakistani consumers perceive these brands in terms of quality, trust, value, and confusion due to brand similarity.

1. *Quality*: Most consumers associate the original brands (Stylo, Layers Bakeshop, Chunk n Cheese, Brufen) with better quality due to longer market presence, consistent branding, and customer reviews. However, imitative brands (Stylish, Layers Cakeshop, Cheese n Crunch, Blufen) often create initial confusion by mimicking packaging or store layout, leading less-informed consumers to assume comparable quality.
2. *Trust*: Trust is primarily built over time through consistent service, recognizable branding, and word-of-mouth. Brufen, for instance, has long been trusted in the pharmaceutical market, while Blufen often sparks mistrust due to unfamiliarity or spelling discrepancy. Similarly, Stylo commands more trust than Stylish, especially among loyal customers who are wary of counterfeits.
3. *Value*: In terms of perceived value, consumers often see the original brands as offering better returns on investment. They are willing to pay slightly more for Layers Bakeshop or Chunk n Cheese because of perceived hygiene, taste, and customer service. Imitative brands may offer cheaper alternatives, but customers frequently express dissatisfaction after use or consumption, reinforcing the belief that the original brand gives better value.

### Brand Confusion and Genre Overlap

The greatest issue lies in brand confusion caused by name similarity and overlapping product genres. Many customers report mistakenly entering a Layers Cakeshop instead of Layers Bakeshop, expecting the same taste and quality but facing disappointment. This confusion is exacerbated in lower-literacy or fast-paced settings like crowded markets. In pharmaceuticals, Blufen being sold beside Brufen in less regulated stores creates serious concerns over health and safety.

**Projected Future: Persistent Strategy**

Imitation branding in Pakistan is likely to remain a persistent market strategy rather than a fading phenomenon. This trend is sustained by weak enforcement of trademark laws, gaps in regulatory frameworks, and a general lack of brand literacy among consumers. Until strong legislative action and public awareness campaigns are implemented, imitation brands will continue to exploit the popularity of originals to gain consumer trust deceptively.

**Visual and Linguistic Mimicry by Sector****Footwear: Stylo vs Stylish**

Stylish mimics Stylo using a similar name structure, logo styling, and storefront design. The name 'Stylish' plays off Stylo's fashion appeal, confusing buyers who rely on visual cues or store location memory.

**Bakery: Layers Bakeshop vs Layers Cakeshop**

The name similarity is exact enough to trick walk-in customers. Layers Cakeshop copies menu names, layout designs, and flavor descriptions. Both adopt Westernized aesthetics and upscale bakery atmospheres, making them visually interchangeable at a glance.

**Fast Food: Chunk n Cheese vs Cheese n Crunch**

The brands mimic one another through word arrangement and alliteration. Both use bright red-yellow branding, cheesy cartoon mascots, and identical food categories like burgers, fries, and cheese-stuffed items. Even social media pages often replicate each other's visuals and wording.

**Pharmaceuticals: Brufen vs Blufen**

The mimicry here is dangerous. Blufen copies Brufen's font, color, and packaging shape. The phonetic closeness is so strong that patients and even some less-trained pharmacists may mistake one for the other—posing serious health hazards. Imitation brands in Pakistan often employ strategic visual and linguistic mimicry to closely resemble established local brands. This approach leverages consumer familiarity and trust associated with the original brands, potentially leading to confusion and inadvertent patronage of the imitators. Let's examine specific examples across various sectors:

**Footwear: Stylo vs. Stylish**

1. *Stylo*: A well-established Pakistani footwear brand known for its trendy designs and vibrant color schemes.
2. *Stylish*: An imitation brand that closely mirrors Stylo's name, differing by only a few letters.

**Mimicry Tactics**

1. *Linguistic*: The name "Stylish" is phonetically and visually similar to "Stylo," potentially causing confusion among consumers.
2. *Visual*: Stylish may adopt similar logo designs, color palettes, and store layouts to those of Stylo, further blurring brand distinctions.

**Bakery: Layers Bakeshop vs. Layers Cakeshop**

1. *Layers Bakeshop*: A popular bakery chain in Pakistan, recognized for its distinctive branding and quality products.

2. *Layers Cakeshop*: An imitation entity that replicates the original brand's name and aesthetic.

### **Mimicry Tactics**

1. *Linguistic*: The addition of "Cake" in place of "Bake" maintains the brand's rhythm and familiarity.
2. *Visual*: Layers Cakeshop may utilize similar typography, color schemes, and packaging designs to those of Layers Bakeshop, aiming to capitalize on the latter's established reputation.

### **Fast Food: Chunk n Cheese vs. Cheese n Crunch**

1. *Chunk n Cheese*: A fast-food brand offering a variety of cheesy dishes.
2. *Cheese n Crunch*: An imitator with a name that rearranges the original brand's components.

### **Mimicry Tactics**

1. *Linguistic*: The rearrangement of words maintains a similar phonetic appeal, potentially leading to brand confusion.
2. *Visual*: Cheese n Crunch may adopt comparable menu designs, signage, and promotional materials to those of Chunk n Cheese.

### **Pharmaceuticals: Brufen vs. Blufen**

1. *Brufen*: A well-known brand of ibuprofen, widely used for pain relief.
2. *Blufen*: An imitation brand that closely resembles the original in name and packaging.

### **Mimicry Tactics**

1. *Linguistic*: The name "Blufen" differs from "Brufen" by only one letter, which can easily be overlooked, especially in handwritten prescriptions.
2. *Visual*: Blufen's packaging may mimic Brufen's color schemes, font styles, and layout, increasing the likelihood of consumer confusion.

## **Discussion**

Imitation branding in Pakistan echoes not only market resourcefulness but also deeper verbal, cultural, and economic dynamics. This research shows that counterfeit or imitation trademarks are not produced in a vacuum; they grow in response to customer mindset, gaps in legal prosecution, and the cultural heft of symbolic branding.

In semiotic expressions, fake brands manipulate signifiers—logos, packaging, labels, and slogans to build associations with legitimacy and quality. Stylish, for instance, uses identical logo style and brand title structure as Stylo, decreasing cognitive space for consumers who already vice Stylo with fashion and reliability. Barthes' idea of mythologies applies here: counterfeit brands take credit on the myth or impression of the original, causing emotional or habitual reactions in consumers. Similarly, Layers Cakeshop imitates the simple, lavish semiotic indications of Layers Bakeshop, misleading consumers into equating both.

Critical Discourse Analysis discloses how mock brands adopt the discursive tactics of originals—plagiarizing not only enterprise but tone, menu language, slogans, and even social media facades. For example, Cheese n Crunch and Crunch n Cheese replicates Chunk n Cheese's fast-food tone, reflecting a discourse of youth, affordability, and innovation. This recontextualization of elite or metropolitan discourse for semi-urban marketplaces signals both aspiration and appropriation. The

imitation brands aren't merely copying—they are adapting powerful linguistic and social codes for their own local context.

As Zaichkowsky (2006) notes, consumer-brand dealing is centered on low-involvement heuristics. That is, many customers rely on optical shortcuts, particularly in packed markets. The phonetic resemblance between Brufen and Blufen, or Stylo and Stylish, exploits this mindset. In lower-income or time-constrained demographics, where reliance is interconnected more with understanding than critical evaluation, mock brands capitalize on observed uniformity to boost sales.

While IPO Pakistan's Trade Marks Ordinance (2000) and the 2023 enforcement testimony clearly explain brand imitation as illegal, on-ground enforcement is insignificant, especially in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Most mock brands function without registration and regularly use logos that are near-identical to originals. Layers Cakeshop, Stylish, and Blufen exist in a lawful vacuum, untouched by cease-and-desist orders, partly because original trademarks do not always pursue legal action in minor arcades due to cost or logistical constraints.

Numerous mock brands started with genuine business struggles (Stylish being a prime example), sourcing from the same manufacturing works as the originals (Stylo, Comely, ECS) before gradually adopting more identifiable branding to survive in an progressively competitive market. This development shows a spectrum of imitation from well-designed copying to cautious deception. The ethics of such alterations are murky: are these survival strategies in a defective economy, or opportunistic violations on brand distinctiveness?

Additionally, the economic collapse, amplified taxation, and customs challenges in Pakistan have hard-pressed many local businesses like Stylish to either replicate or fold. The expedition from originality to imitation is often verbalized by structural pressures, not merely intention. Thus, imitation turn into a form of economic discourse, reflecting systemic gaps in support for local entrepreneurship.

This study places brand imitation as not just a business practice, but as a linguistic, semiotic, and discursive event. The imitation of brand language, characteristics, and perception becomes a significant site for studying power, prestige, consumer ideology, and resistance. For applied linguistics and marketing scholars, this opens opportunities for inspecting how branding functions as a form of socio-economic communication, where signs and discourse create, imitate, and sometimes sabotage authority.

## **Conclusion**

This study critically investigated the phenomenon of brand imitation across four key consumer sectors in Pakistan — footwear, fast food, bakeries, and pharmaceuticals — with a focus on how counterfeit and imitation brands strategically adopt semiotic, linguistic, and discursive elements to blur the boundaries between original and fake. Through qualitative comparative analysis, incorporating semiotic theory (Barthes, 1977) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), alongside consumer surveys, field observations, and product testing, the research revealed a complex interplay between imitation branding, consumer perception, regulatory gaps, and socio-economic realities.

The results confirm that imitation brands in Pakistan deploy calculated visual and verbal mimicry to exploit consumer confusion and cognitive shortcuts. Brands such as Stylish, Layers Cakeshop, Cheese n Crunch, and Blufen purposefully replicate logos, names, store ambiance, and product designs to position themselves as legitimate, affordable alternatives. While consumers are aware of these imitations, economic pragmatism and accessibility significantly drive acceptance,

especially in fast food and footwear sectors. Imitation branding, therefore, is not merely deceptive; it is perceived as a culturally and economically viable solution by large segments of the population. However, the research also uncovered sector-specific ethical and legal challenges. In food and fashion, imitation was socially tolerated and normalized. In contrast, pharmaceutical imitation — particularly in the case of Blufen mimicking Brufen — emerged as highly dangerous, carrying the potential for serious health consequences. This sectoral differentiation highlights that imitation branding must be assessed contextually, balancing affordability with ethical responsibility and consumer safety.

Furthermore, the study exposed the inadequacy of Pakistan's regulatory environment. While laws such as the Trademarks Ordinance (2000) and DRAP regulations exist, weak enforcement, especially in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, has created safe spaces for imitation brands to thrive. This regulatory vacuum enables imitation brands to operate legally unchecked, undermining intellectual property rights and risking consumer trust and health.

A deeper interpretation of findings suggests that imitation branding in Pakistan is deeply rooted in broader socio-economic and cultural discourses. The transition of brands like Stylish — from genuine local businesses to semiotic imitators — illustrates how imitation often stems from market pressures and survival needs rather than mere opportunism. Thus, imitation branding functions as both a reflection of economic hardship and a linguistic-cultural phenomenon that shapes and redefines consumer ideologies.

In conclusion, brand imitation in Pakistan must be understood not as simple commercial fraud but as a layered socio-economic and semiotic event. While it fills market gaps and democratizes access to status products, it simultaneously raises critical ethical, legal, and public health concerns. For policymakers and brand owners, this study underscores the urgent need to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, develop consumer education initiatives, and revisit intellectual property frameworks with sensitivity to local market dynamics. Future research should expand the scope to other sectors and incorporate longitudinal studies to examine whether imitation brands solidify their market presence or fade with evolving consumer awareness. Ultimately, this research contributes to the global discourse on counterfeit branding by offering a culturally contextualized perspective on how imitation brands shape, and are shaped by, the economic and ideological landscape of developing economies like Pakistan.

## References

- Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building strong brands*. Free Press.
- Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer evaluations of brand extensions. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(1), 27–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299005400102>
- Atif, M., Rashid, A., Arslan, M. F., Ullah, F., Amjad, M., & Haroon, H. (2024). A phonetic forensic analysis of Imran Khan's speeches. *Kurdish Studies*, 12(4), 720–732. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378906152>
- Bian, X., & Veloutsou, C. (2007). Consumers' attitudes regarding non-deceptive counterfeit brands in the UK and China. *Journal of Brand Management*, 14(3), 211–222. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550056>
- Eisend, M., & Schuchert-Güler, P. (2006). Explaining counterfeit purchases: A review and preview. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 2006(12), 1–25.
- Faizullah, F., Akram, A., & Arslan, M. F. (2024). Semiotics of deception: A linguistic analysis of packaging industry in Pakistan. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL*, 7(4).

- Grossman, G. M., & Shapiro, C. (1988). Foreign counterfeiting of status goods. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 103(1), 79–100. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882643>
- Kanwal, A., Arslan, M. F., & Ullah, F. (2024). A semiotic analysis of multinational brand advertisements in Pakistan. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL*, 7(1).
- Kapferer, J. N. (1997). *Strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term* (2nd ed.). Kogan Page.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299305700101>
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing management* (15th ed.). Pearson.
- Lee, S. H., Motion, J., & Conroy, D. (2009). Anti-consumption and brand avoidance. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 169–180. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.01.024>
- Nill, A., & Shultz, C. J. (1996). The scourge of global counterfeiting. *Business Horizons*, 39(6), 37–43. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-6813\(96\)90027-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-6813(96)90027-8)
- Phau, I., & Teah, M. (2009). Devil wears (counterfeit) Prada: A study of antecedents and outcomes of attitudes towards counterfeits of luxury brands. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 26(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760910927019>
- Sagheer, I., Fatima, S., Sarwer, S., & Rasool, S. A. (2024). A forensic linguistic analysis of crime language used in the headlines of the newspaper “The News International”. *TANZILAT*, 7(1). <https://tanzilat.com>
- Shakeel, M., Arslan, M. F., & Haroon, H. (2023). An analysis of flags as cultural icons: A semiotic study of 30 countries. [*Journal name not specified*], 7(2), 122–
- Simonin, B. L., & Ruth, J. A. (1998). Is a company known by the company it keeps? Assessing the spillover effects of brand alliances on consumer brand attitudes. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 35(1), 30–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224379803500105>
- Tanveer, S., Shakeel, Z., & Arslan, M. F. (2024). Navigating the complexity: Forensic analysis of likelihood of confusion in Pakistani local trademarks. *ResearchGate*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379778305>
- Thakor, M. V., & Lavack, A. M. (2003). Effect of perceived brand origin associations on consumer perceptions of quality. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 12(6), 394–407. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420310498890>
- Ullah, F., Shahbaz, M. A., & Arslan, M. F. (2023). Semiotic analysis of Zeera Plus biscuit advertisement: Unraveling sign systems and meanings. *Journal of Policy Research*, 9(2), 410–415. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8251043>
- Wilcox, K., Kim, H. M., & Sen, S. (2009). Why do consumers buy counterfeit luxury brands? *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46(2), 247–259. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.46.2.247>