

COUNTERFEIT CRISIS IN INDIA:

Consumers, consumption
and consequences



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About us



IP House

IP House is a global intellectual property security and investigations firm dedicated to safeguarding innovation by protecting brands from counterfeiting, piracy, and all forms of IP theft.

Through its integrated online-to-offline enforcement model, IP House delivers end-to-end brand protection services—combining proactive marketplace assessment and online monitoring with strategic threat and intelligence analysis. Its capabilities include notice and takedown programs, test purchases and controlled buys, people and asset tracing, covert surveillance, and on-the-ground enforcement operations designed to disrupt illicit networks at scale.

IP House collaborates with law enforcement and regulatory authorities worldwide, supporting coordinated action across jurisdictions. The team spans North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia Pacific and the Middle East operating around the clock to detect, monitor, and address IP infringement wherever and whenever it occurs.

The result is a truly global approach to IP enforcement that protects innovation, reinforces compliance across markets, and holds bad actors accountable. IP House is committed to preserving the value and safety of authentic products for brands, creators, and consumers worldwide.



ISB Institute of Data Science

The ISB Institute of Data Science (IIDS), based at the Indian School of Business (ISB), is an interdisciplinary research and capacity-building centre focused on leveraging data science, artificial intelligence, and emerging technologies for societal and economic impact. Positioned at the intersection of technology, policy, and governance, IIDS collaborates with governments, industry, and global institutions to address complex challenges in areas such as retailing, marketing, cybersecurity, digital finance, misinformation, digital piracy, and quantum technologies. The institute produces high-impact research and policy frameworks that inform national and international decision-making, including work on the economic, security, and public safety implications of piracy and counterfeit ecosystems.

A key pillar of IIDS is its emphasis on capacity building through its Advanced Management Programme in Business Analytics (AMPBA), workshops, and training initiatives for senior leaders across public and private sectors, focusing on AI governance, cyber resilience, and digital transformation. Through its multi-stakeholder collaborations and thought leadership, IIDS plays a critical role in advancing responsible, secure, and inclusive adoption of emerging technologies in India and the Asia-Pacific region.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary



Counterfeit products have quietly become one of the most consequential threats to consumer safety, industrial integrity, and public trust. Globally, the trade in counterfeit goods is estimated to drain between USD 1.7 and 4.5 trillion each year, placing it among the fastest-growing forms of illicit commerce.^{1 2} What was once framed largely as an intellectual property problem has evolved into something far more serious. Today, counterfeiting cuts directly into the fabric of daily life, compromising health, safety, and, in extreme cases, human survival.



Counterfeiting has shifted from a brand issue to a systemic threat affecting safety, trust, and everyday consumer welfare.

Unlike luxury counterfeits that primarily erode brand value, the counterfeiting of essential goods - medicines, food and beverages, electronics, children's toys, cosmetics, and automobile components - carries immediate and sometimes irreversible consequences. India's scale, diversity, and consumer economy make it particularly exposed to this risk. A large informal retail sector, fragmented supply chains, rapid expansion of digital commerce, and sustained demand for affordable products together create conditions in which counterfeit goods can circulate widely, often without detection.^{3 4}

Industry estimates underline the magnitude of the challenge. According to FICCI, illicit trade across just five key sectors in India, apparel and textiles, FMCG and packaged foods, pharmaceuticals, consumer electronics, and tobacco, is valued at approximately INR 7.97 lakh crore annually. In packaged foods alone, the illicit market reached

INR 2.23 lakh crore in 2022–23, accounting for more than a quarter of the country's total packaged food market. These figures make clear that counterfeiting is not a fringe activity but a parallel economy embedded within legitimate trade.⁵



India's retail informality, price sensitivity, and digital scale unintentionally create favourable conditions for counterfeit circulation across physical and online markets.

Six categories of products emerge as especially high-risk. Counterfeit cosmetics and personal care items, including baby products, are frequently manufactured using toxic or unregulated ingredients, leading to allergic reactions, burns, and long-term skin damage. Food and beverages, most notoriously spurious liquor, have been repeatedly linked to mass hospitalisations and fatalities. Counterfeit pharmaceuticals, ranging from life-saving cancer drugs to everyday antibiotics and wellness supplements, undermine treatment outcomes through ineffective or dangerous formulations. Substandard electronic products have been associated with fires, electrocution, and property damage. Counterfeit children's toys pose choking and poisoning risks through hazardous materials and poor design. Fake automobile components, including brake pads and airbags, have been directly implicated in road accidents and fatalities. Taken together, these categories demonstrate that counterfeiting in India is not an abstract economic offence but a systemic public health and safety crisis.^{6 7 8 9 10}

"Pharmaceutical counterfeiting in India continues to expand in scale, scope, and sophistication, with incident levels rising across the board in 2025. Criminal networks are targeting the full spectrum of medicines, from high-value monoclonal antibodies used to treat life-threatening conditions to widely consumed, low-cost essential medications distributed at scale. These networks operate through both domestic illicit production and international supply chains, increasing risks to patients within India and beyond its borders. The resulting threat to public health is significant, reinforcing why India remains a top priority for coordinated engagement by the pharmaceutical industry with law enforcement, customs authorities, and drug regulators".

Peter York,
Director of Intelligence,
Pharmaceutical Security Institute (PSI)



Counterfeiting of essential goods converts an economic offence into a public health and safety emergency with real human consequences.

The findings of this report are anchored in a nationwide consumer study conducted by YouGov in June 2025, covering a representative urban Indian sample of more than 1,000 respondents across regions, age groups, and city tiers. The study reveals a striking paradox. Awareness of counterfeits is widespread: seven in ten consumers report being familiar with counterfeit products, and three in five believe counterfeits are prevalent across India. Yet this awareness coexists with persistent exposure and continued consumption. Nearly 80% of respondents admit to having purchased counterfeit products at least once, and more than half of these purchases occurred unknowingly.



High awareness without practical identification tools leaves consumers exposed, enabling counterfeit purchases even among well-intentioned buyers.

This gap between awareness and action lies at the heart of the counterfeit problem. Many consumers recognise that counterfeits exist, but lack the practical tools to identify them in real purchasing environments. Authenticity signals are often weak, delayed, or obscured, particularly in digital and organised retail settings where platform trust and branded interfaces can reduce vigilance. Among those who knowingly purchased counterfeits, most do so infrequently, suggesting opportunism rather than entrenched preference. Price sensitivity, packaging similarity, convenience, and informal

social reassurance frequently shape decisions, indicating that counterfeit exposure is driven less by intent than by information asymmetry.



Ease of access and platform trust frequently override risk awareness making consumers choose convenience over caution enabling counterfeit circulation at scale.

The consequences of this exposure are already being felt. In recent years, methanol-laced liquor has caused mass fatalities across multiple Indian states.⁶ Counterfeit medicines have been linked to treatment failures and child deaths.^{7 8 9} Safety and quality failures linked to uncertified products have also triggered regulatory scrutiny in mainstream commerce channels. In March 2025, India's Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) reported seizures of uncertified products, including goods bearing missing or potentially counterfeit certification labels, from major e-commerce marketplace warehouses, illustrating how even well-known platform supply chains can contain ambiguous authenticity signals for consumers.¹⁰ These incidents are echoed in consumer experience: more than half of survey respondents report health or safety issues linked to counterfeit products, either personally or through someone they know. Allergic reactions are the most commonly reported outcome, followed by treatment failures, poisoning, and physical injuries. Harm from counterfeits is not hypothetical; it is lived.



Counterfeit harm is already lived through injuries, poisonings, treatment failures, and deaths, not merely theoretical risk and are echoed in consumer experience of the respondents.

The economic costs are equally severe. Beyond direct revenue losses, counterfeiting inflates supply chain costs, weakens consumer confidence, and damages the credibility of legitimate businesses. These effects reinforce the need to view counterfeiting not only as an intellectual property issue but as a structural barrier to industrial growth, investment confidence, and national development.

The study also highlights a critical perception gap around criminality. While a majority of consumers agree that selling counterfeit products endangers consumers, fewer than half initially recognise such activity as illegal unless explicitly explained. Counterfeiting is often perceived as a market distortion rather than a criminal offence. This misclassification weakens social stigma, lowers reporting, and reduces expectations of criminal enforcement. When respondents are provided with a clear definition of organised crime, agreement that counterfeiting is linked to organised criminal networks rises markedly, particularly among older consumers. This suggests that public understanding is often latent rather than resistant; once the organised and profit-driven nature of counterfeiting is named, it is more readily accepted.¹¹



Clear legal framing of counterfeiting as organised crime significantly increases public recognition and acceptance of its criminal character.

Encouragingly, consumers support a shared-responsibility approach. A strong majority believe the government should strengthen enforcement, brands should invest in consumer education and authentication, and consumers themselves bear responsibility in avoiding counterfeit purchases. These views point toward the need for coordinated, system-wide action rather than isolated interventions.



Addressing counterfeiting in India therefore requires a calibrated and comprehensive response. Regulatory enforcement and proportionate penalties must be strengthened, but enforcement alone is insufficient. Consumer education must move beyond warnings to provide clear guidance on verification and reporting. Brands and platforms must deploy stronger authentication signals and improve transparency in digital commerce. Above all, public discourse must shift from viewing counterfeits as cheaper substitutes to recognising them as life-threatening risks embedded in organised criminal supply chains.



Addressing counterfeiting in India therefore requires a calibrated and comprehensive response. Regulatory enforcement and proportionate penalties must be strengthened, but enforcement alone is insufficient.

This report brings together consumer data, sectoral analysis, and real-world case studies to illuminate the human, economic, and institutional costs of counterfeiting in India. It concludes with actionable recommendations for policymakers, industry leaders, platforms, and civil society. Counterfeiting cannot be addressed in isolation. It demands a systemic response that reduces supply-side opportunities, reshapes demand-side behaviour, and restores trust in legitimate markets. Only through such an approach can India begin to reverse the normalisation of counterfeit consumption and protect both its consumers and its economy.

01

Introduction: The Hidden Costs of Counterfeit Products

Introduction: The Hidden Costs of Counterfeit Products



Counterfeiting has grown into one of the world's most pervasive and damaging forms of illicit trade. Once dismissed as a nuisance limited to luxury handbags or pirated DVDs, it is now recognized as a multi-trillion-dollar global economy that undermines legitimate businesses, destabilizes governments, and, most critically, endangers lives. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that counterfeit and pirated goods account for more than 2.5% of world trade, worth over USD 467 billion.¹² According to Forbes, which also capture grey-market activity and digital piracy,

place the figure as high as USD 1.7 to 4.5 trillion annually.¹³ These numbers make counterfeiting one of the largest illicit economies in the world, rivalling narcotics and human trafficking.

What sets counterfeiting apart from other illicit trades is its dual cost: economic and human. Businesses suffer revenue losses, reputational harm, and higher operational costs from litigation and anti-counterfeiting measures. Governments lose significant tax revenues while their regulatory credibility is weakened. Consumers, however, bear the gravest burden. Counterfeit products



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**\$1.7
trillion**

to USD 4.5 trillion annually is the estimated global value of illicit trade

enter daily use in the form of medicines, packaged foods, beverages, electronics, automobile components, cosmetics, and children's toys.

"Dealing counterfeit or illicit medicines online may seem like a low-level offence, but the consequences for victims are potentially life-threatening. The illicit supply chains and business models behind the trade in counterfeit medicines are inherently international, meaning that law enforcement has to work together across borders in order to effectively protect consumers."¹⁴

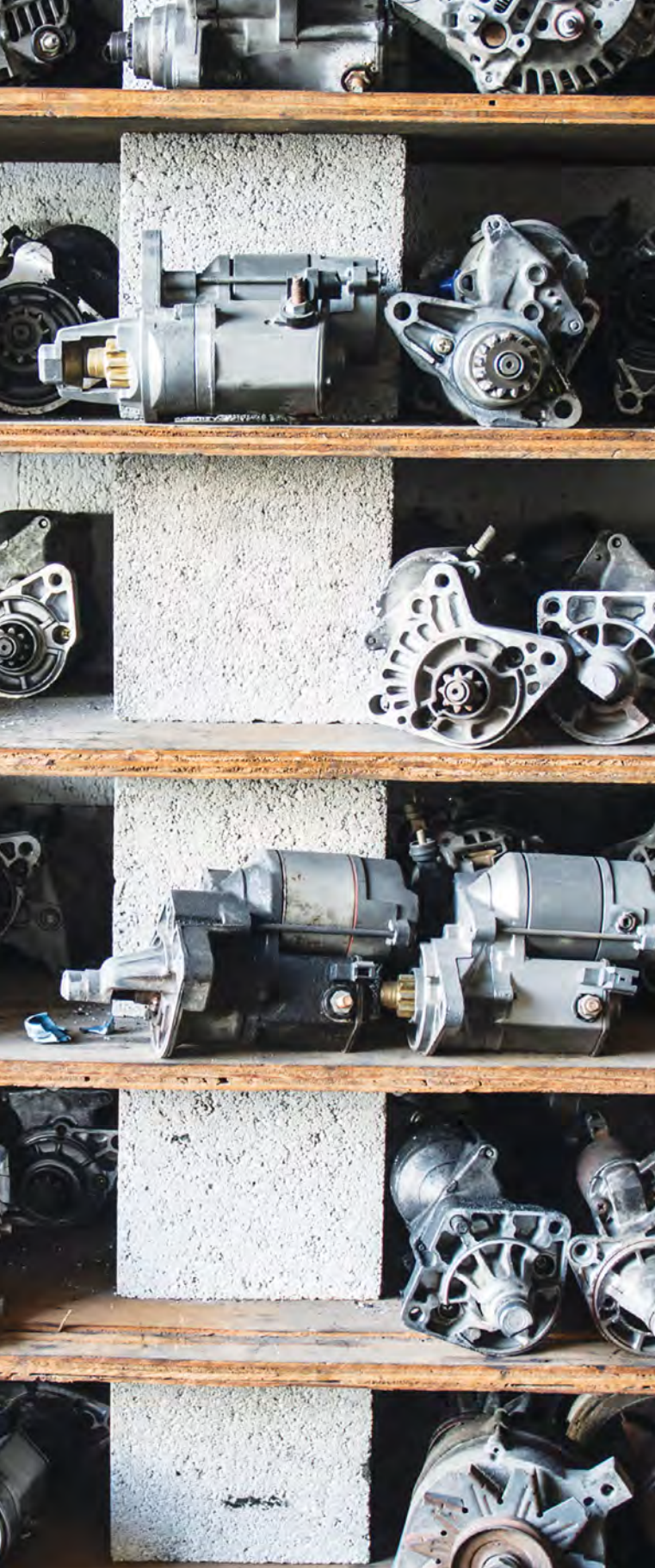
Mr. Jürgen Stock, Interpol Secretary General

90%
of India's

total workforce is
employed in its informal
sector that contributes
nearly 50% to its GDP

India sits at the heart of this global crisis. Its sheer market size, rapid economic growth, and consumer diversity make it a prime target for counterfeiters. Several structural factors converge to heighten the country's vulnerability. The presence of a vast informal economy, employing more than 90% of the workforce, creates fertile ground for unregulated trade.¹⁵ Fragmented supply chains, especially in pharmaceuticals and fast-moving consumer categories, complicate monitoring and traceability. Price sensitivity among large sections of the population sustains demand for cheaper alternatives, which counterfeiters readily supply. The explosive growth of e-commerce and social media marketplaces has created new distribution channels that bypass traditional checks. While India has robust legal frameworks such as the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940, the Consumer Protection Act 2019, and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) regulations Act 2016, enforcement is often inconsistent due to resource constraints, corruption, and judicial delays.





The consequences in most of these cases are severe. Counterfeit pharmaceuticals have been implicated in treatment failures for chronic diseases such as cancer, tuberculosis, and hypertension, with the World Health Organization (WHO) estimating that one in ten medical products in low- and middle-income countries is either substandard or counterfeit.¹⁶ In India, counterfeit paracetamol, antibiotics, and cough syrups have repeatedly caused fatalities. Methanol-laced liquor continues to cause mass deaths, particularly in states with prohibition regimes. Counterfeit cosmetics and personal care products, including baby creams and shampoos, have been linked to allergic reactions and long-term health damage. Unsafe electronic devices, from batteries to chargers, have caused electrical fires and injuries. Counterfeit automobile parts, including brake pads, tires, and airbags, have been directly associated with accidents on India's already burdened roads. Toys manufactured with toxic paints or poorly designed components place children at high risk of poisoning and injury. These cases underscore that counterfeiting in India is not a peripheral problem of intellectual property theft, but a systemic threat to consumer safety and national well-being.



QR codes, holograms, and NFC tags can only succeed if consumers understand their purpose and actively use and trust them, because consumer demand ultimately sustains counterfeit supply.

Beyond individual harm, counterfeiting erodes institutional trust. When consumers cannot reliably distinguish genuine products from counterfeits, confidence in brands, pharmacies, retailers, and even government oversight weakens. This erosion of trust not only disrupts legitimate supply chains but also drives consumers toward informal networks where counterfeiters thrive. Moreover, counterfeit profits often feed into organized crime networks, financing activities ranging from money laundering to arms trafficking. The relatively low legal penalties associated with counterfeiting make it an attractive revenue stream for such groups.

Despite the enormity of the problem, a significant research gap remains. Much of the existing literature focuses on the economic losses borne by industries or the legal frameworks governing intellectual property. Far less attention has been paid to the demand side: why consumers knowingly or unknowingly purchase counterfeits, how they perceive risk, what factors influence their behaviour and what are the actual risks associated with such poorly informed decision making. This gap is critical because consumer demand sustains counterfeit supply. Technologies such as QR codes, holograms, and NFC tags¹⁷ can only succeed if consumers understand their purpose and actively use and trust them. Understanding consumer awareness, motivations, and vulnerabilities is therefore essential to designing effective interventions.



This report seeks to address that gap. It brings together three strands of evidence:

1. **Global and national data on the scale and structure of counterfeit trade;**
2. **Case studies from India that illustrate the human cost of counterfeiting; and**
3. **A nationally representative survey of 1,012 urban Indian consumers, conducted by YouGov in June 2025, that captures awareness, perceptions, purchase patterns, and motivations related to counterfeit goods.**



By combining these perspectives, the report provides both breadth and depth: mapping industry-level impacts while foregrounding consumer behaviour and lived experiences.

The objectives of the report are fourfold:

1. To document the scale and nature of counterfeit trade in India with emphasis on health and safety risks
2. To analyse consumer awareness, perceptions, and behaviours as key drivers of counterfeit demand
3. To highlight real-world consequences through sector-specific case studies
4. To provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, enforcement agencies, industry leaders, digital platforms, and consumers.



By reframing counterfeiting as a public health and safety crisis rather than merely an intellectual property concern, this report aims to shift the discourse toward urgent action.

By reframing counterfeiting as a public health and safety crisis rather than merely an intellectual property concern, this report aims to shift the discourse toward urgent action. Counterfeiting is not a victimless crime. It is a systemic assault on consumer safety, industrial integrity, and regulatory credibility. Recognizing this reality is the first step toward designing solutions that protect lives, restore trust, and safeguard India's future as a resilient consumer economy.

02

Global Counterfeit Trends: Who's Behind the Fakes

Global Counterfeit Trends: Who's Behind the Fakes



Counterfeiting has evolved into one of the most pervasive and profitable forms of illicit trade worldwide. Once perceived as a marginal issue limited to pirated fashion accessories, today it is a globally structured illicit economy with profound consequences for consumer safety, industrial resilience, and public trust.

What makes counterfeiting particularly insidious is its ability to infiltrate legitimate markets. Blurred boundaries between the legitimate and illicit economies result in counterfeit medicines being found in hospital supply chains, counterfeit

electronic components embedded in devices sold through mainstream e-commerce, and spurious auto parts unknowingly fitted by mechanics into vehicles.

"Counterfeit and smuggled goods are not only a threat to the country's economy, but also bring serious harm to the consumers. Illicit products have infiltrated everyday avenues of commerce, making their way into supply chains, posing threat to individuals' health and safety."¹⁸

Mr P K Malhotra, Former Secretary,
Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India

2.1 Sectoral Patterns in Counterfeiting

Although counterfeiting touches nearly every industry, six categories are recognised as the highest risk because of their direct implications for health and safety.

Cosmetics and Consumer Goods

The global beauty and personal care market, valued at over USD 600 billion, is a prime target for counterfeiters.¹⁹ Counterfeit cosmetics often contain lead, arsenic, mercury, or carcinogenic dyes, leading to burns, rashes, and long-term health damage. Counterfeit baby creams, shampoos, and hygiene products are especially concerning because they affect vulnerable populations. Beyond health risks, such products undermine consumer trust in legitimate brands and retailers. In the United States and Europe, raids by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Europol routinely seize counterfeit cosmetics containing mercury, arsenic, and bacteria. In 2018, the Los Angeles Police Department uncovered counterfeit lipsticks laced with faecal matter sold through flea markets and informal online sellers.²⁰ These products caused rashes, infections, and long-term dermatological issues. Europol operations have similarly seized counterfeit perfumes with methanol and industrial solvents, products that pose risks far beyond cosmetic irritation.

Food and Beverages

Counterfeit food and drinks represent one of the gravest counterfeit markets worldwide. Spurious liquor alone is responsible for tens of thousands of deaths annually, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Counterfeit packaged foods, including dairy products, oils, and confectionery, pose risks of poisoning, contamination, and bacterial infection. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has highlighted counterfeit food as a rising global barrier to food safety and nutrition security. In China, the 2008 melamine milk scandal poisoned thousands of infants, leading to kidney damage and multiple fatalities.²¹ In Europe, the 2013 “horsemeat scandal” revealed fraudulent substitution of beef with horsemeat in packaged foods, eroding consumer trust in supply chains.²² In Kenya, consumption of locally brewed illicit liquor has repeatedly caused blindness, organ damage, and premature death among both men and women. In Laos, methanol-laced counterfeit liquor has recently triggered fatalities, prompting international experts to publicly warn about the scale of risk.²³

In Southern Africa, counterfeit whiskey and spirits smuggled from clandestine distilleries in Zambia and Tanzania have flooded markets in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and South Africa. These products are often sophisticated enough to pass as genuine, deceiving even trained bartenders. Yet they are made from industrial chemicals in the same facilities used to process narcotics, and are sold at prices as low as USD1.50 per bottle, compared to over USD20 for genuine whiskey.²⁴ Doctors in Zimbabwe have already reported spikes in kidney and lung failure linked to consumption of these products, particularly among unemployed youth.

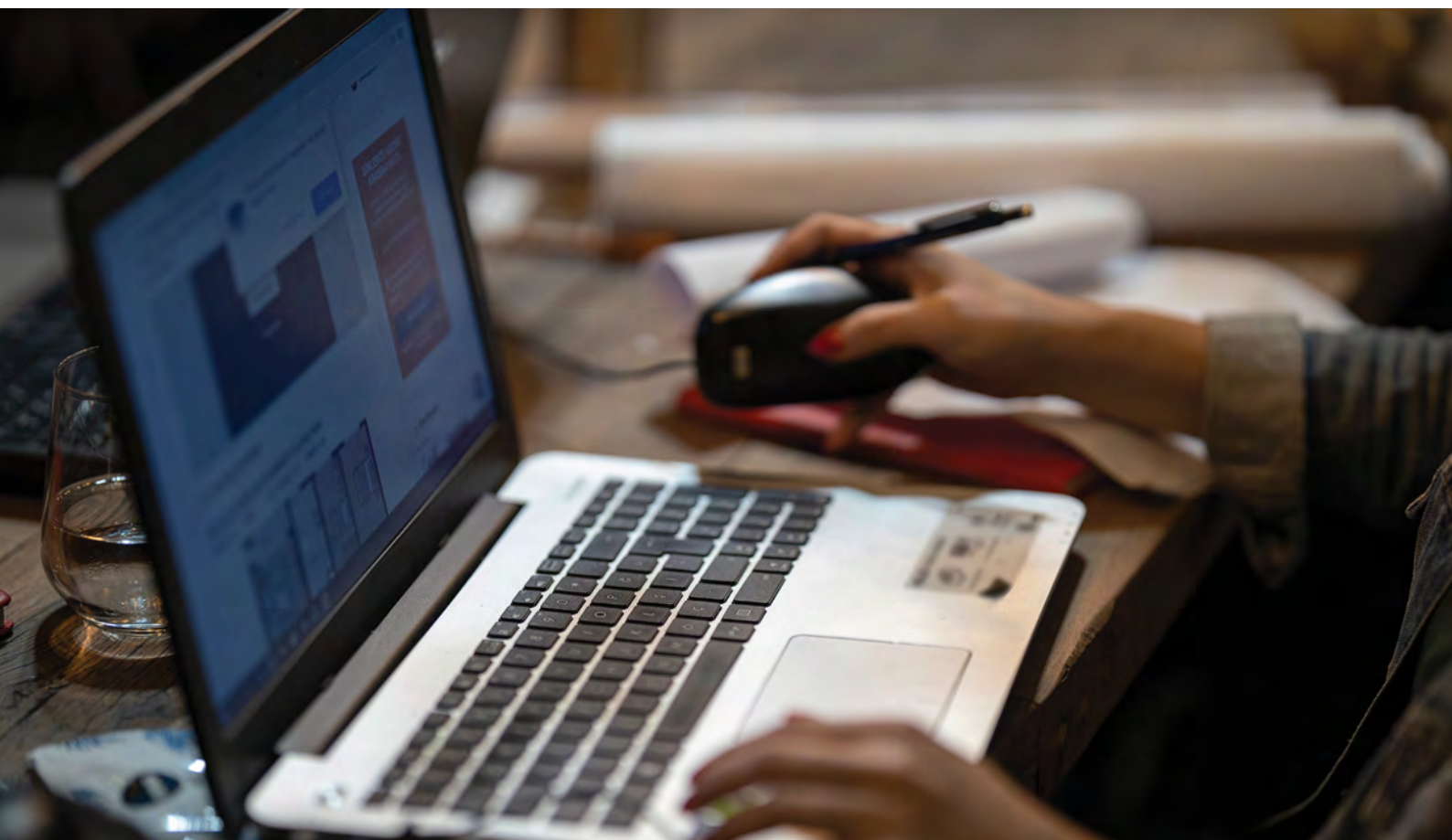


Doctors in Zimbabwe have already reported spikes in kidney and lung failure linked to consumption of these products, particularly among unemployed youth.

Pharmaceuticals

Few counterfeit categories are as dangerous as medicines. The World Health Organization estimates that substandard or falsified medicines account for up to 10% of all drugs circulating globally, contributing to hundreds of thousands of deaths each year.²⁵ Fake antibiotics, anti-malarials, and cancer treatments are widespread in developing countries, undermining treatment outcomes and fuelling drug resistance. Counterfeit vaccines and wellness drugs compound these risks. In Nigeria, seizures of counterfeit antimalarial drugs in September 2025 revealed products with no active pharmaceutical ingredients, contributing to drug resistance and preventable deaths.²⁶ In the United States, counterfeit versions of life-saving drugs such as Avastin were found in 2012, containing starch and acetone instead of active ingredients.²⁷ These examples illustrate how counterfeit pharmaceuticals jeopardize healthcare systems worldwide.





Electronic Products

The proliferation of counterfeit electronics from mobile chargers and lithium batteries to small appliances, poses significant fire, electrocution, and device-damage risks. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has documented numerous consumer injuries caused by such products. For manufacturers, counterfeit electronics generate warranty claims, reputational harm, and financial losses, while consumers often struggle to distinguish counterfeit from genuine products. In the UK, Trading Standards seized counterfeit Apple chargers that failed safety testing in 99% of cases, often leading to fires and electrocutions.²⁸ In the U.S., more than 16,000 counterfeit hoverboards valued at USD 6M were seized in Chicago.²⁹

Children's Toys

Counterfeit toys, often overlooked in public debates, are a major global concern. A European Commission study found that nearly 60% of all

toys seized at EU borders were counterfeit, many containing toxic paints, hazardous phthalates, or small detachable parts that pose choking risks.³⁰ Children are the most vulnerable consumers, and counterfeit toys expose them to both immediate physical danger and long-term developmental harm. In 2021, German customs seized thousands of counterfeit Lego sets with dangerous sharp edges and toxic paint.³¹ In the U.S., counterfeit slime toys have been linked to skin irritation in children.³²

99% seized by UK Trading Standards failed safety testing, often leading to fires and electrocutions.
of counterfeit Apple chargers



2.2 Geographic Hotspots of Production and Distribution

Counterfeiting is a globalised illicit economy with production, transit, and consumption spanning continents.

- **China** remains the single largest source, accounting for more than 45% of global seizures.³⁵ Factories often operate “third shifts,” producing unregistered counterfeit batches alongside legitimate goods.
- **South and Southeast Asia** including India, Vietnam, and Indonesia, are growing markets and emerging production hubs. Weak enforcement, affordability pressures, and informal retail systems sustain counterfeit trade.

Automobile Accessories

Counterfeit auto parts including brake pads, tires, airbags, and lubricants, have been linked to accidents and fatalities worldwide. The Automotive Anti-Counterfeiting Council (A2C2) in the U.S. and similar organisations in Asia have documented large-scale seizures of fake parts. These products circumvent rigorous safety testing, leaving drivers and passengers exposed to catastrophic failures. In 2023, Saudi Arabia and the UAE raids have uncovered counterfeit brake pads and airbags that disintegrate on impact.³³ From 2019, U.S. federal prosecutors indicted suppliers for distributing counterfeit airbags, which exploded with shrapnel, injuring drivers.³⁴



- **Middle East and Africa** function as key transit points and consumption zones, with counterfeit pharmaceuticals particularly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Europe and North America** are major end markets. Despite stronger regulatory frameworks, both regions see large inflows, especially in electronics, pharmaceuticals, and personal care. Counterfeit production within Eastern Europe is also on the rise.³⁶



Traditional markets often serve as the primary point of accidental counterfeit purchases, particularly for cosmetics, apparel, and accessories.



2.3 Distribution Channels: From Bazaars to Digital Platforms

“Fake and unapproved medications are a serious risk to public health. They can include dangerous or illegal ingredients potentially resulting in severe illness, or even death. The rapid growth of online platforms has made it easier for these unsafe drugs to reach people as well as opening new opportunities for criminal networks to exploit.”³⁷

David Caunter, Interpol Director pro tempore of Organized and Emerging Crime

The routes of counterfeit distribution have transformed dramatically over the last two decades.

- **Traditional Markets:** Informal street markets and wholesale bazaars remain dominant in developing economies. They often serve as the primary point of accidental counterfeit purchases, particularly for cosmetics, apparel, and accessories.
- **E-commerce Platforms:** Online marketplaces provide counterfeiters with scale, anonymity, and legitimacy by association.³⁸ Consumers frequently struggle to differentiate genuine sellers from fraudulent ones. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to digital channels. Lockdowns and supply disruptions drove demand online, creating opportunities for counterfeiters to market fake masks, sanitizers, and medicines.
- **Social Media Commerce:** Social media sites and messaging apps now facilitate direct-to-consumer counterfeit sales with minimal oversight. These platforms are particularly significant for cosmetics, toys, and small electronics.

2.4 Organized Crime – The Dark Side of Counterfeiting

“The very DNA of organized crime is changing. Criminal networks have evolved into global, technology-driven criminal enterprises, exploiting digital platforms, illicit financial flows and geopolitical instability to expand their influence. They are more adaptable, and more dangerous than ever before. Breaking this new criminal code means dismantling the systems that allow these networks to thrive – targeting their finances, disrupting their supply chains and staying ahead of their use of technology.”³⁹

Catherine De Bolle, Europol Executive Director

Counterfeiting is often imagined as a street-level nuisance, vendors selling cheap imitations in local markets. In reality, it is one of the most globally structured and lucrative criminal enterprises in the world. Far from being a marginal activity, counterfeiting is deeply embedded in organized crime. Investigations by Europol, Interpol, and national enforcement agencies consistently show that counterfeit trade intersects with narcotics, arms trafficking, cybercrime, and money laundering.⁴⁰

Global case evidence for the organized crime nexus would include:

- Operation Pangea VIII (2022): Enforcement in 115 countries dismantled 2,400 websites and seized counterfeit pharmaceuticals worth USD 81 million.⁴¹



45% of global

counterfeit seizures are attributed to China, which remains the world's largest production hub.

- **Eurojust Pill Smuggling Case (2024):** A network trafficking six million prescription pills across multiple EU states was dismantled, showing the sophistication of European criminal syndicates.⁴²
- **Counterfeit Auto Parts in the U.S.:** The Automotive Anti-Counterfeiting Council uncovered counterfeit airbags imported from China and sold via shell distributors, highlighting infiltration into legitimate supply chains.

These cases demonstrate how counterfeit trade is systemic, spanning across continents, products, and criminal economies.

The appeal is obvious – high profits, low risks. Counterfeiting offers profit margins comparable to narcotics, but with lighter penalties in almost all jurisdictions. Unlike drug smuggling, counterfeit goods can be concealed within legitimate supply chains, giving criminal groups both scalability and potential deniability.

Modern counterfeit operations are structured like multinational businesses. They use global shipping routes, exploit free trade zones, and rely on fragmented enforcement systems that struggle to keep pace. Networks employ specialists for production, packaging, distribution, and finance, and operate through shell companies that make tracing responsibility nearly impossible.

How the counterfeit crime networks operate:

- **Production Hubs:** China remains the world's largest source, accounting for more than 45% of global counterfeit seizures.⁴³ Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and parts of Africa are emerging as regional hubs, often with local assembly of goods smuggled in parts.⁴⁴
- **Cross-border Logistics:** Counterfeiters exploit free trade zones, fragmented customs oversight, and small-parcel shipments. Goods or component parts are shipped in components such as empty packaging, labels, and raw materials and assembled closer to end markets to reduce seizure risks.
- **Supply Chain Infiltration:** What makes organized counterfeiting so dangerous is its ability to blend with legitimate commerce. This infiltration blurs the line between legal and illegal trade, enabling criminal networks to scale operations while retaining plausible deniability. By way of example: counterfeit pharmaceuticals have been discovered in hospital procurement systems; counterfeit auto parts and electronics have been distributed through authorised-looking retailers; and adulterated food and beverages circulate through formal supply chains, often indistinguishable until harm occurs.

“

With the rise of e-commerce, organized crime has expanded into digital storefronts, fake seller accounts, and cross-border drop shipping.

- **Distribution Channels:** Dark web marketplaces facilitate cross-border sales of pharmaceuticals and restricted goods. With the rise of e-commerce, organized crime has expanded into digital storefronts, fake seller accounts, and cross-border drop shipping. Interpol's Operation Pangea XVI (2023) seized counterfeit pharmaceuticals worth over USD 7 million and shut down more than 1,300 illicit websites, demonstrating the scale of this digital migration.⁴⁵



Financing and Criminal Convergence:

Counterfeit trade generates billions in liquid cash, making it a convenient tool for money laundering and illicit finance.

- Europol has documented multiple cases where counterfeit profits were redirected to finance drug cartels and extremist groups.⁴⁶
- Shared logistics corridors mean that the same routes used for narcotics or arms are repurposed for counterfeit consignments.
- Financial flows are concealed through informal transfer systems and shell entities, reducing visibility to regulators.

The convergence of counterfeiting with other criminal economies underscores why it cannot be treated as a minor intellectual property issue. It is a case of national security and governance challenge.

"There can be no safe havens for corrupt, terrorists, drug cartels, poaching gangs, organized crime... When the threats are global, response cannot be just local,"⁴⁷

Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi,
addressing the 90th General Assembly of INTERPOL

\$7 million worth counterfeit pharmaceuticals seized in Interpol's Operation Pangea XVI (2023)



While the scale is global, the consequences are acutely national. India mirrors many of these dynamics, fragmented supply chains, digital vulnerabilities, and entrenched criminal networks. The next chapter turns to India's counterfeit landscape, where the global patterns outlined here translate into specific risks across six critical categories: cosmetics and consumer goods, food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, electronics, children's toys, and automobile accessories.

03

India's Counterfeit Landscape – Shocking Insights

India's Counterfeit Landscape – Shocking Insights



India is one of the world's fastest-growing consumer markets, but it is also one of the most vulnerable to counterfeit trade. The counterfeit economy is not confined to luxury products or informal bazaars; it has penetrated everyday essentials—medicines, food, cosmetics, toys, electronics, and automobile parts. Unlike counterfeit handbags or luxury watches, these categories directly affect human life, household safety, and public trust.

The urgency to study counterfeiting in India lies in its scale and consequences. According to the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), counterfeiting and smuggling

across just five key industries: (i) Textiles and Apparel; (ii) FMCG-Packaged Foods; (iii) FMCG-Personal & Household Care Goods; (iv) Alcoholic Beverages; (v) Tobacco Products, have already inflicted losses of over INR 8 lakh crore annually (USD 95.2 billion).⁴⁸ But these figures capture only the economic side of the problem. The human cost is far greater. Mass deaths from methanol-laced liquor, child fatalities from toxic cough syrups, road accidents caused by counterfeit brake pads, and skin damage from counterfeit cosmetics underscore that counterfeiting in India is not an economic irregularity but a public health and safety emergency.



Counterfeiting is not limited to high-end luxury items. Even common items, from cumin seeds to cooking oil and from baby care items to medicines, are increasingly reported as counterfeit.”⁴⁹

- Suresh Krishnamurthy,
Senior Director, CRISIL Market
Intelligence & Analytics

In addition, India's aspiration to be a trusted global hub for pharmaceuticals, consumer goods, and digital commerce is at risk. If counterfeit infiltration continues unchecked, not only are consumers endangered, but India's international reputation as a producer of affordable, safe, and reliable goods may be compromised. Counterfeiting is no longer an issue to be framed in terms of intellectual property violations. It is an urgent governance, safety, and trust challenge that demands coordinated action from policymakers, regulators, industry leaders, and consumers.

3.1 Scale and Scope of the Problem

Studies consistently estimate that 25–30% of products sold in key Indian sectors are counterfeit or substandard.⁵⁰ Unlike in many developed economies, where counterfeit consumption is often deliberate and linked to luxury aspirational goods, in India much of the counterfeit trade infiltrates essential commodities or items that households cannot avoid. Consumers frequently purchase counterfeits unknowingly, while opportunistic buyers knowingly trade safety for affordability.

**\$95.2
billion**

annual losses in India
across five industries
from counterfeiting &
smuggling (FICCI)



This normalization of counterfeit goods makes the crisis systemic. India's counterfeit economy is estimated to affect over 25% of all products sold in key urban cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Kolkata. The counterfeiting is most rampant in sectors like apparel (31%), FMCG (28%), auto parts (25%), and pharmaceuticals (20%).⁵¹ Grey markets in major cities, e-commerce platforms, and even licensed retailers form part of the counterfeit economy. Supply chain fragmentation, weak enforcement, and price sensitivity converge to create conditions where counterfeiting thrives at scale.

The problem is most acute in six critical categories: cosmetics and consumer goods, food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, electronics, children's toys, and automobile accessories. Each sector demonstrates not only how counterfeiters exploit structural vulnerabilities but also how these goods inflict lasting harm on Indian consumers.

The health consequences are significant. Laboratory tests of seized cosmetics have revealed high concentrations of lead, mercury, arsenic, and banned preservatives. Consumers have reported skin burns, rashes, and long-term dermatological damage. Particularly concerning are counterfeit baby creams, powders, and shampoos, which have exposed infants to allergic reactions and toxic chemical absorption. These cases underline that counterfeit cosmetics are not "low risk," but instead a public health hazard.

For example, in Mumbai (2019), authorities seized thousands of counterfeit branded cosmetics.⁵² Tests confirmed unsafe levels of mercury in creams marketed for skin-lightening. Similarly, anecdotal survey evidence highlights women developing skin allergies from counterfeit lipsticks purchased online during flash sales. These are not isolated cases but evidence of a systemic market, facilitated by informal retailers and e-commerce platforms with weak seller verification.

3.2 Cosmetics and Consumer Goods

Cosmetics and everyday personal care products have become some of the most counterfeited items in India, driven by aspirational branding, wide demand, and ease of replication. Raids in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru have uncovered counterfeit shampoos, creams, soaps, and baby products packaged so convincingly that even retailers struggled to distinguish them from genuine items.

25%
of products

in key urban cities are estimated affected by counterfeits





What makes cosmetics especially dangerous is consumer underestimation of risk. Many buyers view them as non-essential or “safer” compared to pharmaceuticals. Yet direct application to the skin, eyes, and body makes them a high-risk category requiring urgent regulatory attention.

3.3 Food and Beverages

If cosmetics carry hidden risks, food and beverages embody the most visible and deadly consequences of counterfeit trade in India. Bootleg liquor, adulterated dairy products, and counterfeit packaged foods have repeatedly caused mass harm.

In Punjab (2020), more than 100 people died after consuming methanol-laced liquor, while similar tragedies have been reported in Bihar and Tamil Nadu.⁵³ In Jaipur (2025), police intercepted 1000 kilograms of counterfeit paneer, made from synthetic compounds unfit for human consumption.⁵⁴ In Delhi (2025), snacks made with illicit or adulterated buckwheat flour caused food poisoning and hospitalized more than 200 people.⁵⁵ These cases illustrate how adulterated food infiltrates everyday consumption and can claim lives within hours of exposure.

Unlike other counterfeit products, food and beverages are daily essentials. Even the suspicion of contamination undermines public trust in food safety systems. Counterfeiters exploit affordability pressures and distribution gaps, making unsafe products available in both rural *kirana* shops and modern urban supermarkets.





Consumers perceive food and liquor counterfeiting as high-risk, which survey data confirms. Yet the persistence of such products in both physical and digital markets demonstrates that regulatory enforcement remains patchy and reactive, often catching counterfeiters only after harm has occurred.

3.4 Pharmaceuticals

Pharmaceutical counterfeiting is arguably the gravest dimension of India's counterfeit landscape. The problem spans a wide spectrum of products: antibiotics, oncology drugs, anti-malarials, vaccines, over-the-counter syrups, vitamins, and chronic disease medicines such as those for diabetes and hypertension.

The consequences are severe. Counterfeit medicines not only fail to treat illnesses but

actively harm patients. They can contain chalk, flour, industrial dyes, or incorrect dosages of active ingredients. Beyond immediate fatalities, counterfeit drugs contribute to antimicrobial resistance—a silent epidemic already threatening India's healthcare system.

India has witnessed numerous tragedies linked to counterfeit medicines. In 2024, Delhi police seized counterfeit cancer drugs worth INR4 crore (USD480,000). Patients receiving these ineffective treatments suffered relapses, and at least one fatality was reported.⁵⁶ In Kanpur the same year, a racket was uncovered producing common prescription medicines from chalk soil, sold openly in retail channels.⁵⁷ Earlier, in Himachal Pradesh and Bhubaneswar⁵⁸ (2023), toxic counterfeit cough syrups were linked to child deaths, echoing similar incidents reported internationally.

The structural vulnerabilities are clear. India's pharmaceutical distribution is fragmented across thousands of stockists, many operating with limited oversight. Weak traceability systems allow counterfeit drugs to blend seamlessly into formal supply chains, including hospitals and licensed pharmacies. This undermines consumer trust in both domestic and global markets, a particularly damaging outcome given India's anticipated role as the "pharmacy of the world."

Pharmaceutical counterfeiting in India must therefore be reframed not just as an economic crime but also as a public health emergency. Each counterfeit drug is a potential fatality, and each infiltration erodes trust in national healthcare systems.



2024 Delhi

Police seized **INR 4 crore** worth counterfeit cancer drugs

3.5 Electronics

Electronics represent a fast-growing counterfeit category in India, with risks ranging from household safety to digital security. Counterfeit chargers, power banks, batteries, and small appliances are widely available in urban grey markets and online platforms.

The dangers are immediate and tangible. Fires, electrocutions, and property damage have all been linked to counterfeit electronic goods. In Maharashtra (2024), a person's private parts were injured when a mobile phone's battery exploded.⁵⁹ Such incidents illustrate how counterfeit electronics, often indistinguishable from genuine products, bypass basic safety certification and quality testing.

India's digital adoption, marked by rising smartphone and device penetration, has created fertile ground for counterfeit electronics. Many buyers knowingly trade authenticity for affordability, seeing such purchases as low-risk compared to counterfeit pharmaceuticals or food. This perception is misleading: a single faulty charger can burn down a home, and substandard lithium batteries can cause injuries or deaths.

Trends show

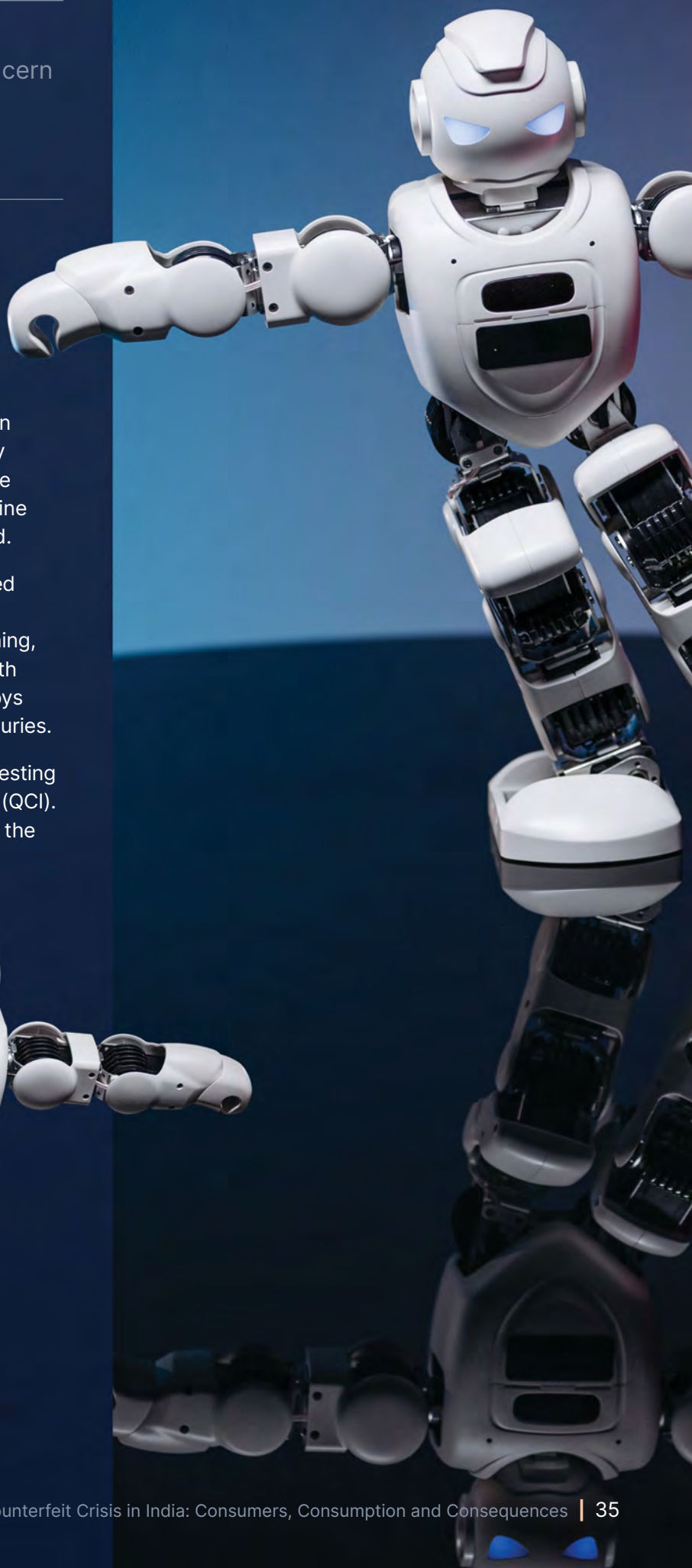
that consumer concern in this category remains low.

3.6 Children's Toys

Counterfeit toys are one of the most underappreciated risks in India's illicit trade in counterfeit industry. Parents, often driven by affordability and lack of awareness, purchase counterfeit toys from street markets and online sellers without realizing the hazards involved.

Testing of seized counterfeit toys has revealed high concentrations of lead, cadmium, and phthalates, chemicals known to cause poisoning, developmental disorders, and long-term health complications. Poorly designed counterfeit toys also present choking hazards and physical injuries.

In 2019, 67% of the imported toys failed the testing survey of the Quality Control Council of India (QCI). Around 30% of the plastic toys failed to meet the





safety standards of admissible levels of phthalate, heavy metals etc, and 80% of the plastic toys failed the mechanical and physical safety test.⁶⁰ According to numerous studies, exposure to toxic chemicals found in counterfeit toys can seriously harm children's health.⁶¹ Such cases demonstrate that counterfeit toys pose serious risks to the most vulnerable population: children.

Trends show that consumer concern in this category remains low. This dangerous gap between perception and reality makes toys one of the most pressing but overlooked counterfeit categories in India.



3.7 Automobile Accessories

Automobile accessories represent a hidden but deadly facet of India's counterfeit market. The automotive industry in India is one of the largest in the world, accounting for 7.1% of the GDP and 49% of manufacturing GDP.⁶² The automotive aftermarket is estimated to have nearly 36% counterfeit penetration, including brake pads, filters, spark plugs, lubricants, and engine oils.⁶³

The risks here are diffuse but severe. Counterfeit auto parts compromise road safety by failing under stress. A counterfeit brake pad or airbag may work until a critical moment, with fatal consequences.

In 2025, Delhi police seized ₹50 lakh (USD60,000) worth of counterfeit auto parts from Karol Bagh, one of the largest grey markets for automobile accessories.⁶⁴ Investigations revealed a mix of domestic and imported counterfeit supplies, often packaged with convincing branding. These cases highlight how counterfeit auto parts infiltrate workshops and service centers, leaving consumers unaware of the risks to their vehicles and lives.

Unlike counterfeit liquor or pharmaceuticals, whose dangers are immediate and visible, counterfeit auto parts kill silently, contributing to India's already alarming road accident statistics.



3.8 Why is India Vulnerable: The Counterfeit Distribution Network

Counterfeiting in India is not merely the outcome of opportunistic production but the product of a well-entrenched and a criminally organized distribution ecosystem that enables counterfeit goods to move from small-scale manufacturing hubs to mainstream consumer markets. It is shaped by structural, economic, and behavioral vulnerabilities. Fragmented supply chains, especially in pharmaceuticals and food, make traceability difficult. Enforcement remains reactive and under-resourced, with raids disrupting small operators but rarely dismantling large networks.

Consumer price sensitivity compounds the problem. In Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, affordability often outweighs authenticity. Awareness is also uneven. While consumers express concern about pharmaceuticals and food, they underestimate risks in toys, cosmetics, and auto parts.

Digital commerce has amplified the challenge. Even major E-commerce platforms have repeatedly been flagged for counterfeit listings, while social media marketplaces and messenger groups allow counterfeiters to bypass formal retail systems entirely. The result is a counterfeit economy embedded in both physical and digital markets, normalized as part of everyday consumption.

All these vulnerabilities are systemic. They lie in the size of India's informal economy, its porous supply chains, the explosion of e-commerce, and weak enforcement visibility. Together, these factors create a fertile environment for counterfeiters to thrive.

1. The Multi-Tiered Network

At its core, India's counterfeit economy operates through a multi-tiered structure:



Production: Often clustered in peri-urban zones (e.g., Bhiwandi in Maharashtra, Karol Bagh in Delhi, or hubs in Uttar Pradesh), production is carried out by small-scale clandestine units that operate with minimal oversight. Modern printing and packaging equipment enables these producers to replicate branding and packaging with alarming accuracy.



Wholesale Aggregators: Bulk consignments are channelled to large wholesalers based in metropolitan hubs like Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata. These wholesalers serve as the backbone of the counterfeit economy, distributing goods to both regional markets and online sellers.



Regional Distributors: Counterfeits are broken down into smaller consignments and pushed into Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets, where the supply of genuine goods is weaker and oversight is limited.



Retail Outlets: At the last mile, counterfeit goods are sold through street markets, neighbourhood kirana stores, pharmacies, and garages. Many legitimate shops also unknowingly stock counterfeit goods alongside genuine ones, blurring consumers' ability to distinguish between the two.



E-Commerce & Social Media: The rise of digital platforms has transformed counterfeit distribution. Sellers create digital storefronts with minimal KYC checks, often using fraudulent GST registrations. Social media influencers and closed messenger groups increasingly promote counterfeit cosmetics, wellness supplements, and electronics.

2. Blending with Legitimate Supply Chains

One of India's greatest vulnerabilities lies in the blurring of lines between counterfeit and legitimate channels. Counterfeits are not confined to informal street vendors; they also regularly penetrate formal pharmacies, supermarkets, and e-commerce platforms.

3. Cross-Border Inflows

India's porous borders and busy ports serve as entry points for counterfeit consignments from abroad. Goods often arrive through:

- Container shipments mislabelled under false HS codes.
- Small-parcel courier imports, particularly of pharmaceuticals and electronics.
- Transit hubs such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, and Guangzhou, which often become staging points for global counterfeit supply.

These flows overwhelm customs capacity, especially when detection relies on manual checks rather than risk-based scanning.



In India, counterfeits are not confined to informal street vendors; they also regularly penetrate formal pharmacies, supermarkets, and e-commerce platforms.



4. Enforcement Weaknesses

Despite frequent raids, enforcement remains fragmented and reactive. Police, customs, and regulators (like state drug controllers) often work in silos. There is no central intelligence-sharing platform linking seizures across states, allowing counterfeiters to adapt quickly. Further, raids are rarely publicized in ways that link seizures to consumer harm, reducing their deterrent effect.

Tier 2 and 3 cities face limited distribution of genuine goods enabling counterfeit dominance

5. Structural Vulnerabilities

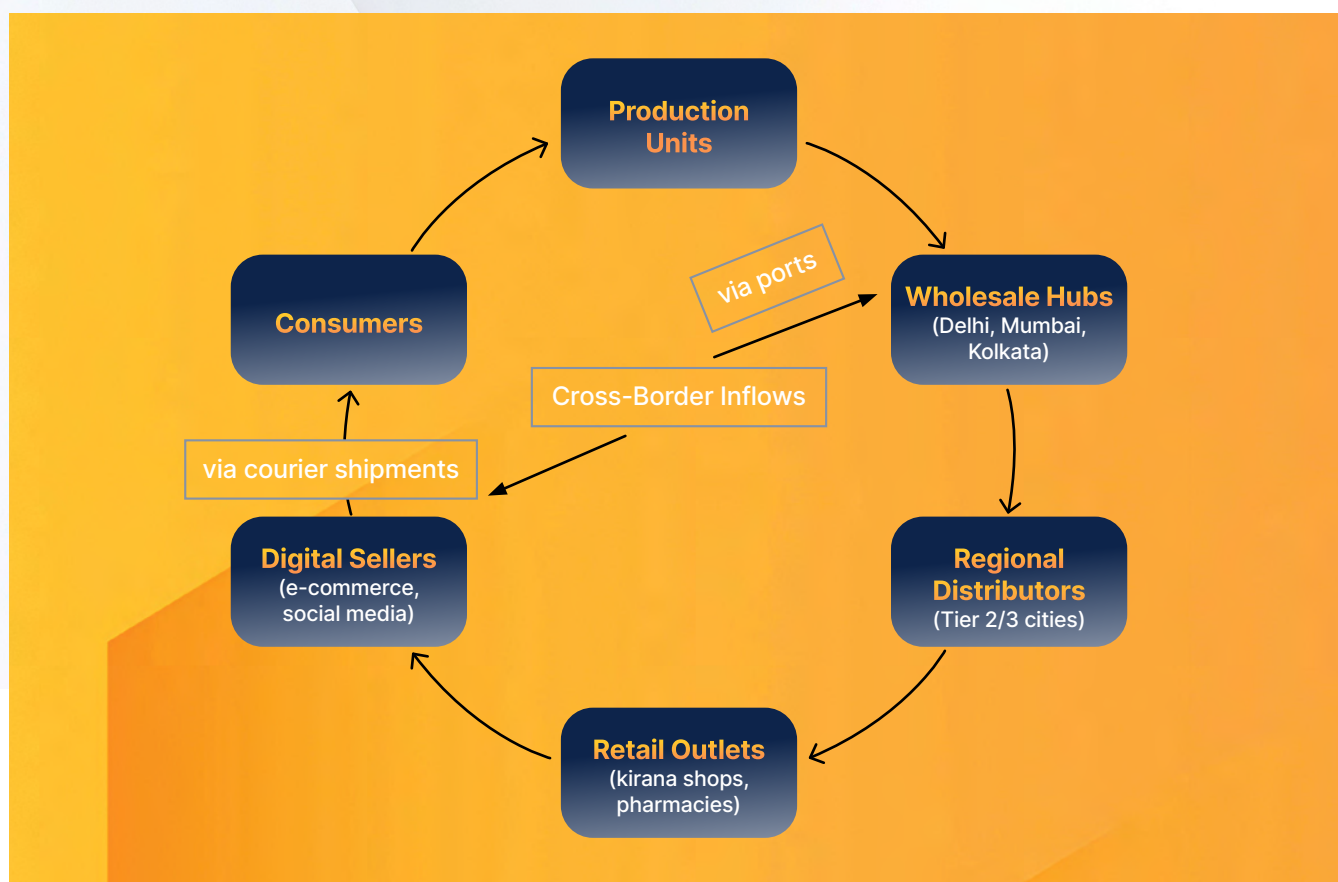
India’s exposure to counterfeits is rooted in three systemic weaknesses:

- 1. **Scale of Informality:** With nearly 80% of India’s retail sector unorganized, counterfeit goods move freely in spaces beyond regulatory oversight.
- 2. **Supply Gaps in Tier 2 & 3 Cities:** Limited distribution of genuine goods in smaller cities creates opportunities for counterfeits to dominate local markets.
- 3. **Low Consumer Awareness:** Many consumers rely on packaging and price as proxies for authenticity, making them vulnerable to deception.

Table 1: Anatomy of India’s Counterfeit Distribution Network

STAGE	PLAYERS INVOLVED	MECHANISM	VULNERABILITY
Production	Small-scale clandestine units; informal factories	Use of cheap labour, recycled materials, and modern packaging tech to replicate branding	Minimal oversight; low entry barriers make production easy to restart after raids
Wholesale Hubs	Aggregators in metro hubs (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata)	Bulk movement of counterfeit consignments to regional markets	Weak monitoring of wholesale markets; counterfeit goods blend with legitimate stock
Regional Distribution	Middlemen servicing Tier 2/3 cities	Break bulk consignments into smaller shipments, sold through informal supply chains	Tier 2/3 oversight gaps; high consumer demand for affordable substitutes
Retail & Informal Markets	Kirana stores, street vendors, garages, pharmacies	Stocking counterfeits alongside genuine goods	Consumers are unable to distinguish between authentic and counterfeit goods
E-Commerce & Social Media	Online storefronts, influencers, WhatsApp/Telegram groups	Listings with fake GST IDs, aggressive marketing, and quick entry-exit cycles	Weak KYC norms, no central blacklist, rapid proliferation across platforms
Cross-Border Flows	Ports, courier hubs, free trade zones	Mislabelling under HS codes, use of global transit hubs	Customs overstretched, inadequate use of AI-enabled scanning

India's Counterfeit Distribution Network



3.9 The Human Cost

Counterfeiting ceases to be an abstract economic nuisance when it results in injury, chronic illness or death. The most sobering aspect of India's counterfeit landscape is the scale of human harm. Counterfeit cough syrups have killed children. Methanol-laced liquor has wiped out entire communities. Fake drugs have led to treatment failures and deaths. Counterfeit chargers have burned homes, and counterfeit auto parts have caused fatal accidents.

Unlike counterfeit handbags or watches, these counterfeits are not about lost luxury—they are about lost lives. Beyond the direct casualties, the counterfeit economy erodes consumer trust, weakens industries, and undermines confidence in regulatory institutions. In India, the normalization of counterfeit goods is itself a risk, as acceptance sustains demand and makes eradication even harder.

India's counterfeit trade is both systemic and urgent. It spans six critical categories that directly impact human health and safety, infiltrates both informal and formal markets, and thrives on structural weaknesses in supply chains and enforcement.



The crisis cannot be reduced to a question of brand protection or tax revenue loss. It must be recognized as a public health, safety, and governance challenge.

Counterfeiting in India is not a victimless crime. It literally kills children, endangers households, and undermines trust in markets. Confronting it requires urgent action from regulators, industry leaders, and consumers alike. The next chapters of this report examine consumer behaviour, survey findings, and the way forward in addressing this pervasive threat. This section synthesises how organized counterfeit networks operate (their modus operandi), the types of manufacturing, and concrete case evidence that illustrates the scale and severity of harm.

These harms are amplified by the fact that counterfeits often remain indistinguishable until failure



Counterfeit goods can kill or harm consumers in a number of ways:

- Direct toxic exposure (e.g., methanol in liquor, industrial chemicals in food, heavy metals in cosmetics and toys).
- Therapeutic failure (e.g., medicines with no active pharmaceutical ingredient (API), wrong dosage, or harmful adulterants).
- Mechanical or functional failure (e.g., counterfeit brake pads, batteries or chargers causing crashes, fires or electrocution).

These harms are amplified by supply-chain invisibility: counterfeit products are often indistinguishable from the real product until they fail, and many victims (patients, children, drivers, households) have no way of identifying the risk beforehand.

Modus operandi: How Are These Dangerous Counterfeits Produced & How Do They Reach Consumers

Organized counterfeit operations follow a repeatable playbook. Understanding these steps is critical for targeted enforcement and prevention.

1. Sourcing of raw materials and inputs

- **Cheap or Industrial Substitutes:** Counterfeiters substitute legitimate raw materials with industrial chemicals, fillers (e.g., chalk, starch), or reclaimed waste. Examples: chalk used in place of APIs in tablets; industrial methanol used instead of ethanol for bootleg liquor.
- **Cross-border Inputs:** Key packaging elements (labels, holograms, boxes) or active ingredients are procured internationally and shipped as separate consignments to avoid detection.

2. Production / Manufacturing Setups

- **Small Clandestine Units:** Low-visibility workshops or repackaging units have been known to operate in industrial sheds, rented kitchens, or converted warehouses. These units may produce high volumes with minimal hygiene, safety, or quality control.

- **Hybrid Industrial Clusters:** In some cases, counterfeit production is embedded within legitimate manufacturing hubs (a “third shift” model) where counterfeit batches are made alongside genuine products after normal hours.
- **Semi-mechanised Lines:** Equipment ranges from hand tools and small mixing vessels to semi-automated filling and labelling machines; printing plates and packaging equipment are common seizures.

3. Packaging and Forgery

- **High-fidelity Replication:** Counterfeiters often invest in professionally printed labels, boxes, and serialized-looking codes to mimic brand cues that consumers rely on.
- **Fragmentation Tactics:** Components (packaging, caps, instructional leaflets) can be transported separately and assembled near point-of-sale to reduce the risk of a single large seizure.

4. Distribution and Concealment

- **Layered Wholesaling:** Goods can pass through multilayered wholesaler networks that intentionally mix counterfeit and genuine products to evade detection.
- **Dual Channel Strategy:**
 - o Physical Informal Channels (street markets, small retailers, wholesale bazaars) — often where unknowing purchases occur.
 - o Digital Channels (e-commerce listings, social media storefronts, and messaging groups) — increasingly used for deliberate purchases because of anonymity and convenience.
- **Logistics Tactics:** Small-parcel shipments, use of third-party couriers, and relabelling at free-trade zones are common evasive techniques.

5. After-sales and Concealment of Harm

- **Lack of Traceability:** No batch records or verifiable distribution chains exist for many counterfeits; victims often cannot trace origin.
- **Market Re-entry:** Seized counterfeiters frequently re-enter under new trade names or via different platforms, making sustained enforcement difficult without shared databases.

Table 2: Manufacturing Units

CATEGORY	TYPICAL PRODUCTION SET-UP	COMMON COUNTERFEIT COMPONENTS / TYPICAL ILLICIT INPUTS
Pharmaceuticals	Small clandestine tableting or vial-filling units, repackaging sheds; sometimes illicit lines inside legitimate facilities	Chalk/starch as filler, incorrect Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), substandard solvents, reused vials, counterfeit labels
Food & Beverages (liquor, packaged foods)	Illicit distillation units, clandestine mixing rooms, food repackaging sheds	Industrial methanol, industrial solvents, non-food fillers, recycled packaging
Cosmetics & Consumer Goods	Small labs producing creams, lotions; repackaging and re-bottling centres	Industrial dyes, mercury compounds, hydroquinone, non-cosmetic grade preservatives
Electronics	Small workshops assembling chargers, battery packs; counterfeit cell assembly	Substandard cells, cheap wiring, non-UL components
Children's Toys	Import of counterfeit toy parts or local moulding in small workshops	Lead-containing paints, phthalates, brittle plastics
Automobile Accessories	Repacking of imported components and local remanufacture in auto bazaars	Substandard friction material for brake pads, inferior rubber for tyres, substandard oil/filters

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Seized counterfeits frequently re-enter under new trade names or via different platforms, making sustained enforcement difficult without shared databases.



04

Consumer Awareness and Behaviour: What People Don't Know

Consumer Awareness and Behaviour: What People Don't Know



The counterfeit economy does not survive on supply alone. Their supply chain is fuelled by consumer demand and how consumers perceive them, tolerate them, and in many cases, finance them through everyday choices. In India, where affordability pressures meet weak regulatory safeguards, the consumer becomes both a victim of counterfeiting and, at times, an unwitting enabler.

At first glance, awareness of counterfeits in India appears relatively high. Most consumers acknowledge that counterfeit goods exist and recognise that they circulate widely. Yet, closer analysis shows that awareness is often superficial, fragmented, and inconsistent across sectors.

Consumers are quick to voice concern about counterfeit medicines or alcohol, but the same caution rarely extends to cosmetics, toys, or electronics, even though the risks are comparable.



This contradiction lies at the heart of India's counterfeit economy: knowledge without understanding, caution without consistency, and harm without deterrence.

4.1 Consumer Awareness– Action Gap

Awareness is frequently assumed to be a safeguard: if consumers know counterfeits exist, they will avoid them. The evidence suggests otherwise. Many consumers who are “aware” of counterfeits continue to purchase them, sometimes unknowingly, sometimes by choice.

Three dynamics explain this paradox:

- **Shallow understanding:** Many consumers conflate counterfeits with parallel imports, “first copies,” or even legitimate generics, leaving them vulnerable to deception.
- **Risk compartmentalisation:** Counterfeits in pharmaceuticals and food are feared; counterfeits in cosmetics, toys, or auto parts are treated as low concern, despite clear safety risks.
- **Behavioural tolerance:** Even after experiencing harm, some consumers continue using counterfeits, citing affordability or availability as justification.

Consumer engagement with counterfeits often reflects a calculated trade-off between risk and reward.

- **Economic pressure:** Price is the most cited reason for counterfeit consumption. In a market where household budgets dominate purchasing decisions, the lower cost of counterfeits is difficult to resist.

- **Product resemblance:** Counterfeiters exploit consumer psychology by replicating packaging, design, and labelling so convincingly that even cautious buyers struggle to detect counterfeits.
- **Social influence:** Normalisation by peers, family, and informal networks reinforces counterfeit use. When others in a community openly buy and use counterfeits, individual resistance weakens.
- **Information gaps:** Consumers often rely on friends, family, and social media rather than official channels for product knowledge. This reliance perpetuates misinformation and limits informed decision-making.

Consumer engagement

with counterfeits often reflects a calculated trade-off between risk and reward.





These motivations reveal that counterfeit consumption is not solely a question of affordability. It is equally shaped by trust, perception, and social norms.

4.2 Experiences of Harm

Counterfeit consumption is not a theoretical risk; it translates into tangible harm. Reports of allergic reactions from counterfeit cosmetics, treatment failures linked to spurious medicines, electrocutions caused by counterfeit electronics, and tragedies from adulterated liquor all point to a pattern of lived consequences. Yet, many consumers continue to tolerate counterfeits even after harm either out of necessity or resignation. To illustrate the scale of human suffering more vividly, **Annexure 4** (“When Fakes Turn Fatal”) presents detailed case evidence from recent years, highlighting how counterfeit

medicines, foods, cosmetics, electronics, toys, and auto parts have directly caused deaths, injuries, and long-term health damage across India.

This highlights a dangerous behavioural cycle: exposure breeds normalisation, and normalisation reduces the urgency to avoid future risks.





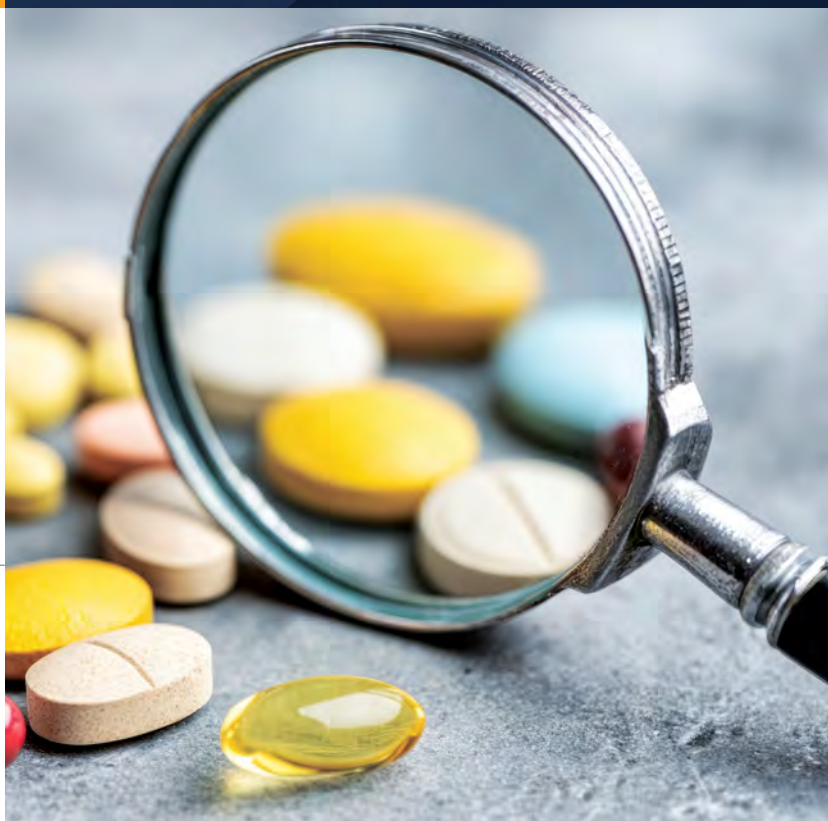
Counterfeiters are becoming smarter, better funded, and organized. Thus, the onus is on consumers to stay one step ahead of them. Also the growth of ecommerce and globalisation of markets have made the fight against counterfeiting even more challenging.

Nakul Pasricha,
President, Authentication Solution Providers'
Association (ASPA)⁶⁵

The next chapter presents detailed findings from the **YouGov Perceptions & Experience Study (2025)**, which surveyed over 1,000 urban Indian consumers. That data provides a granular view of how awareness, behaviour, and attitudes toward counterfeits differ by category, demographic group, and region, offering crucial insights into how demand is sustained and how it can be changed.

**1,000+
urban
Indian**

consumers were surveyed in the YouGov Perceptions & Experience Study revealing granular insights on counterfeits.



05

Measuring and Understanding the Problem: The YouGov Study

Measuring and Understanding the Problem: The YouGov Study



This chapter presents the core consumer-facing findings of the YouGov–IP House–ISB study, drawing on a nationally distributed urban Indian sample to examine how counterfeit products are understood, encountered, and navigated in everyday life. Unlike enforcement-led assessments that infer harm from seizures or prosecutions, this chapter centres the consumer experience capturing awareness, purchasing behaviour (both intentional and unintentional), risk perception, health and safety outcomes, and views on responsibility and criminality. By tracing the consumer journey from recognition to decision-making and consequence, the chapter provides a grounded picture of how counterfeits function within real markets, where authenticity

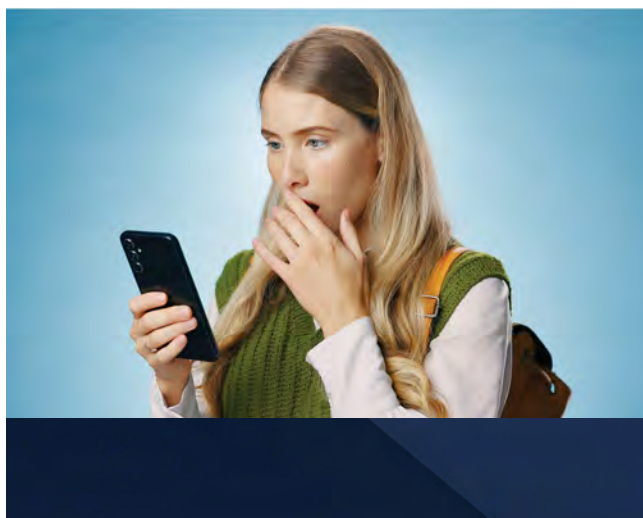
signals are uneven and trade-offs between price, convenience, and trust are routinely negotiated.

The questionnaire was deliberately structured to follow the consumer journey in sequence, separating recognition of counterfeits from identification ability, channel exposure, purchase behaviour, and post-purchase consequences. This design allows the study to distinguish between surface-level awareness and functional understanding, and to reveal why high familiarity with counterfeits can coexist with continued exposure and harm.

A key strength of the study lies in its disaggregation by city tier, age cohort, and purchase channel, which adds critical explanatory power to the

findings. Tier-wise analysis is particularly valuable in the Indian context, where retail formality, access to branded goods, price sensitivity, and reliance on digital platforms vary significantly between Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 cities. By capturing these differences, the study is able to show how counterfeit risk is experienced as platform-driven and trust-mediated in larger cities, while being more normalised and price-driven in smaller urban markets. Similarly, age-based and channel-based questions surface how social influence, convenience, and perceived legitimacy shape behaviour differently across segments. Taken together, the study builds a nuanced picture of counterfeiting as a systemic consumer risk rather than a marginal or isolated phenomenon, offering evidence that is directly relevant for policy design, enforcement prioritisation, consumer education strategies, and platform governance.

What makes this study distinctive is its ability to move beyond headline awareness and surface the structural dynamics that allow counterfeits to persist despite high familiarity. The analysis reveals not only where consumers encounter counterfeit risk, but why awareness often fails to translate into avoidance—highlighting information asymmetries, platform trust, social influence, and misclassification of counterfeiting as a market issue rather than criminal conduct. By disaggregating results across age cohorts, city tiers, and channels, the chapter shows how exposure and risk vary systematically across India's consumption landscape. In doing so, it



positions the YouGov study as a rare, evidence-based contribution that bridges consumer psychology, public health, and policy—offering insights that are directly relevant for regulators, industry, and platforms seeking to design interventions that reflect how counterfeits are actually experienced on the ground.

5.1 Study Overview and Methodology

This chapter presents the key findings from YouGov, conducted to assess Indian consumer awareness, perceptions, behaviours, and risks associated with counterfeit products generally as well as counterfeit products from within the following categories:

- Cosmetics & consumer goods
- Electronic products
- Food & beverages
- Children's toys
- Automobile accessories
- Pharmaceuticals

The consumer study was undertaken by YouGov India in 2025, using an online survey methodology and a nationally distributed urban Indian sample of 1,012 respondents.

The sample was balanced across gender, age cohorts, city tiers, and regions. Men and women were represented in nearly equal measure, while age groups ranged from young adults to older consumers, capturing both digital-native buyers and peak consumption cohorts.

Respondents were drawn across regions North (32.91%), West (20.55%), East and Northeast (17%), and South India (29.45%), and across age cohorts including Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X. The research design captured both attitudinal and behavioural dimensions, including awareness, purchasing behaviour, health and safety experiences, legal perceptions, and views on responsibility and enforcement.

Its geographic scope further spans urban and semi-urban India, covering Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 cities capturing consumer behaviour unfolding across very different market realities. Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities together account for more than 61.85% of the sample, a critical feature given that counterfeit circulation in these markets often follows different pathways than in major metros. In smaller urban centres, consumers are more price-sensitive, less brand aware, depend more heavily on informal retail networks, and frequently face limited access to authorised branded outlets. In such settings, counterfeit products may circulate less as anomalies and more as pragmatic substitutes, accepted within the constraints of awareness, availability and affordability. By capturing these contexts alongside Tier 1 markets, the dataset is well positioned to inform targeted responses.

The online survey format ensured visibility into consumers who shop on e-commerce platforms and social media-driven marketplaces, while also reflecting the experiences of those who continue to buy from urban street markets and organised retail outlets.

Methodologically, the questionnaire structure separates awareness, perceived prevalence, actual purchase, known versus unknown purchase, channels, health impacts, and criminality perception into distinct steps. That sequencing helps explain a core pattern that emerges - namely that consumers can recognise the word "counterfeit" and even experience harm, yet may struggle to connect counterfeiting to illegality and organised criminal supply chains.

“

The sequencing of the questionnaire helps explain the core pattern that emerges later: people can recognise the word “counterfeit” and even experience harm, yet still struggle to connect counterfeiting to illegality and organised criminal supply chains.



Building on this structure, the study was guided by four interlinked research objectives intended to capture both consumer exposure to counterfeit products and the mechanisms through which such exposure occurs. First, the study assessed consumer awareness, examining familiarity with counterfeit products and the extent to which consumers can distinguish counterfeits from generics, parallel imports, or authentic branded goods. Second, it evaluated risk perceptions, with particular attention to health and safety risks across product categories. Third, it documented consumer behaviour, distinguishing between unintentional (accidental) and intentional (deliberate) counterfeit purchases. Fourth, it examined perceptions of responsibility, identifying which actors consumers believe should play a primary role in addressing counterfeiting, including government authorities, brands, digital platforms, physical retailers, and consumers themselves.

The objective of this study was not only to quantify exposure to counterfeit products, but also to understand consumers familiarity, risk perception, and what can motivate their decision making.

Because this is an online urban sample of 1,012 respondents fielded over a period of six days,

the results are best interpreted as a snap-shot of how counterfeit products are perceived and experienced in the most commercially connected segment of India, where exposure to marketplaces, e-commerce, and social media driven commerce is high. The study is not capturing fringe exposure; it is capturing counterfeits as a normalised feature of daily consumption in environments where “choice” is abundant but “authenticity signals” can be weak.



The study is not capturing fringe exposure; it is capturing counterfeits as a normalised feature of daily consumption in environments where “choice” is abundant but “authenticity signals” can be weak.

Table 3: Demographic Composition of the Survey

DEMOGRAPHIC	DISTRIBUTION	REMARKS
Gender	Male 49.6%, Female 50.4%	Balanced sample
Age	18–24 (21%) 25–34 (28%) 35–44 (26%) 45+ (25%)	Captures digital natives + peak consumption cohorts
City Tiers	Tier 1 (38%) Tier 2 (25%) Tier 3 (36%)	Reflects diversity of urban/semi-urban markets
Regions	North, South, East/Northeast, West, Central	Proportional representation
The sample was balanced across gender, age groups, city tiers, and regions, ensuring representativeness.		

5.2 Awareness and Perceived Prevalence of Counterfeits

The study found that awareness is not only high, but also broad, ambient, and social: “7 in 10 are aware” and “3 in 5 believe counterfeits are prevalent throughout India.” This combination implies that counterfeits are not being perceived as an occasional anomaly, but are perceived as a structural market reality. When a risk becomes “expected,” consumers often adapt by treating authenticity as negotiable depending on category, price, or urgency.

At the same time, the study notes a knowledge gap around what constitutes a counterfeit. That gap is not trivial, it is the difference between “I know fakes exist” and “I can reliably identify one, report one, or avoid one.” This distinction becomes clearer when viewed alongside the distribution of familiarity levels in the data: while 70% of respondents report varying degrees of familiarity (Extremely familiar to somewhat familiar) with counterfeit products, only 37% describe themselves as extremely or very familiar, indicating that depth of knowledge remains limited. By contrast, a substantial share remain on the margins of understanding, including 32% who

report only a basic understanding, 19% who are merely slightly familiar, and 12% who say they are not familiar at all.

This suggests consumer awareness alone may not automatically convert into consumer resistance because awareness without definition produces normalisation, not deterrence. When familiarity is shallow or uneven, consumers may recognise the idea of counterfeits while still lacking the practical cues needed to identify them in real purchasing environments, allowing counterfeit exposure to persist even among those who consider themselves “aware.”

70% of respondents report some degree of familiarity with counterfeit products, **only 12%** describe themselves as extremely familiar.



Disaggregated analysis suggests that overall awareness remains high across regions, reinforcing the idea that counterfeits have entered a shared national vocabulary rather than remaining localised phenomena. However, how prevalence is perceived varies by location.

- **Tier 1 city respondents** are more likely to describe counterfeits as widespread across India, reflecting exposure to multi-channel retail environments that include e-commerce, organised retail, and social commerce.
- **Tier 2 and Tier 3 respondents** are more likely to associate counterfeits with everyday local availability, where prevalence is experienced as part of routine neighbourhood commerce rather than as an abstract national issue.

When results are examined by age, the nature of awareness becomes more differentiated:

- **Younger consumers (18–24)** report high familiarity with counterfeits, but this familiarity

is concentrated in basic or moderate understanding. Their awareness appears largely ambient and social—shaped by peer networks, social media, and shared assumptions—rather than grounded in detailed identification knowledge.

- **Millennials (25–44)** show higher overall familiarity and are more likely to report being very familiar. However, they also account for a substantial share of unintentional purchases later in the data, suggesting that confidence does not always translate into effective identification.

Younger consumers'

(18-24) awareness appears largely ambient and social

Familiarity With Counterfeit Products, Counterfeit Product Commonality in India

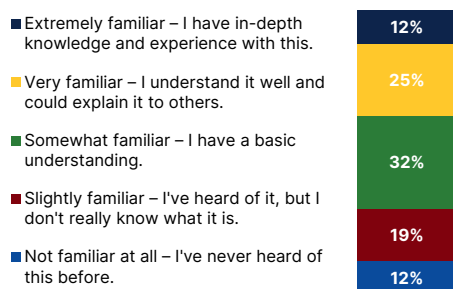
YouGov®

7 in 10 respondents are aware of counterfeit products and 3 in 5 believe these products are prevalent throughout India.

Familiarity With Counterfeit Products

Net: Top 3 Box (Extremely familiar + Very familiar + Somewhat familiar)

70%



Q1. How familiar are you with counterfeit products (fake/replicas)?

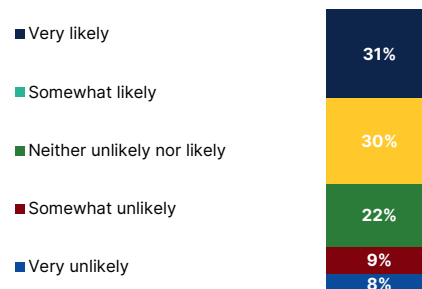
Q2. How likely do you think counterfeit products (fake/replicas) are commonly found in India?

Base (1012)

Counterfeit Product Commonality in India

Net: Top 2 Box (Very likely + Somewhat likely)

61%



- **Older consumers (45+)** report slightly lower overall familiarity, but are disproportionately represented among those who describe themselves as extremely familiar, indicating a smaller but more deeply informed group.

Segment-level analysis by city tier reinforces this divide. Tier 1 consumers are more likely to recognise counterfeits as a systemic market issue, but they also operate in environments where authenticity signals are layered and indirect, increasing reliance on platforms, branding, and institutional trust. As a result, high awareness does not necessarily translate into lower exposure. In Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, familiarity is more uneven: a larger share of respondents' cluster at the extremes, either very familiar due to repeated local exposure, or only slightly familiar, having heard of counterfeits without clear understanding. In these contexts, counterfeits are often normalised as affordable substitutes rather than explicitly categorised as illicit products.

Taken together, these disaggregated patterns suggest that awareness functions differently across segments. In some contexts, it reflects shared recognition without operational clarity; in others, it reflects experience without formal definition. In neither case does awareness reliably produce deterrence on its own. Instead, when counterfeit risk becomes expected whether through digital saturation in Tier 1 cities or routine exposure in smaller urban markets consumers adapt by negotiating authenticity pragmatically, adjusting expectations based on category, price, urgency, and trust in the point of sale. This





helps explain why high awareness coexists with continued unintentional purchases: awareness that lacks precision does not disrupt behaviour, it simply becomes part of the background conditions under which consumption occurs.

Tier 1 consumers

are more likely to recognise counterfeits as a systemic market issue, but they also operate in environments where authenticity signals are layered and indirect.

Tier 2 and Tier 3

cities: a larger share of respondents' cluster at the extremes, either very familiar due to repeated local exposure, or only slightly familiar, having heard of counterfeits without clear understanding.



When counterfeit risk becomes expected whether through digital saturation in Tier 1 cities or routine exposure in smaller urban markets consumers adapt by negotiating authenticity pragmatically, adjusting expectations based on category, price, urgency, and trust in the point of sale.



5.3 Consumer Purchasing Behaviour and Intent

Nearly 79% of respondents admit to having purchased counterfeit products at some point, with around 43% reporting that these purchases were made unknowingly, pointing to significant gaps in product authenticity transparency. Among respondents who knowingly purchased counterfeit products, 71% do so occasionally or rarely.

The most consequential behavioural finding is not only the 79% who report having purchased counterfeits, but the fact that around 43% did so “unknowingly”. This shifts the story from “some consumers choose fakes” to “many consumers cannot reliably distinguish authenticity in real buying conditions.” This points to a market failure around authenticity transparency.

Among those who knowingly purchased, the study shows purchases are largely infrequent (71%) and driven primarily by price (66%). This pattern reads like opportunism rather than identity that many consumers are not committed counterfeit buyers, they are situational buyers responding to a perceived bargain. This finding suggests warning labels, verification prompts, seller reputation cues, and audits can meaningfully reduce demand because the behaviour is not deeply entrenched.

Consumers appear to enter counterfeit transactions when conditions align most often around perceived value rather than because of a stable preference for counterfeit goods. The factors shaping these decisions cluster clearly:

- **Affordability (66%)**, especially in routine or non-durable categories
- **Packaging similarity (61%)**, where visual cues substitute for verification especially when authenticity markers are subtle or unfamiliar.
- **Convenience (60%)**, ease of access may override caution, particularly in trusted retail or platform environments.
- **Social influence (56%)**, where peer reassurance outweighs formal warnings
- **Difficulty distinguishing genuine from counterfeit (56%)**, navigating authenticity decisions with limited diagnostic tools
- **Unintentional purchases (43%)**, driven by information asymmetry rather than deliberate choice.

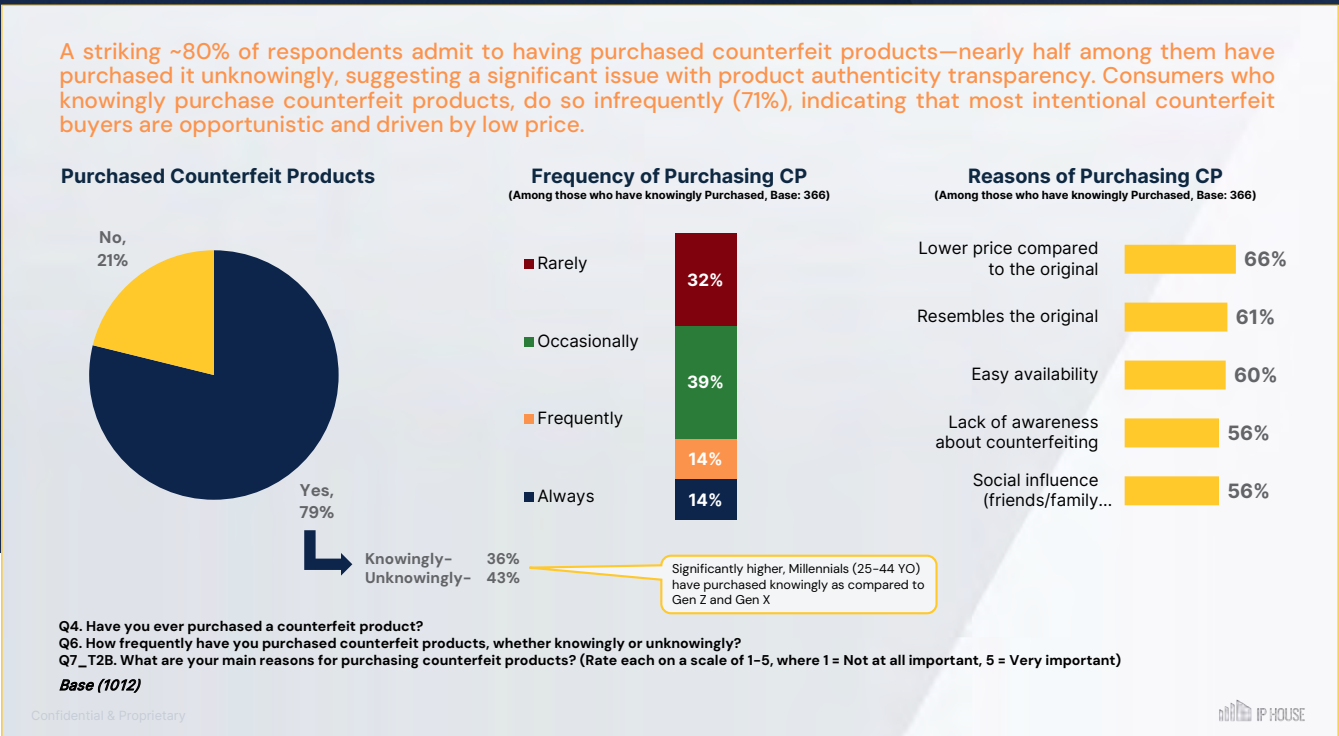
These dynamics play out differently across age cohorts and city tiers. When results are examined by age, younger consumers (18–24) emerge as the most socially influenced, with awareness shaped by peers, social media, and visual familiarity, leading to higher unintentional exposure. Millennials (25–44) are the most likely to be opportunistic knowing buyers, balancing awareness with price-driven pragmatism. Older consumers (45+), while generally more cautious and better informed, remain vulnerable to accidental purchases in trusted environments where institutional credibility substitutes for verification.

City-tier patterns reinforce this segmentation. Tier 1 consumers, despite high awareness, experience more accidental exposure driven by convenience and platform trust. Tier 2 consumers show mixed behaviour, balancing affordability with convenience across formal and informal channels. Tier 3 consumers are more price-driven and semi-aware, often factoring counterfeit risk into purchasing decisions rather than actively avoiding it.

Across segments, counterfeit purchasing is best understood not as a single consumer behaviour but as a sequence: ambient awareness → uneven familiarity → situational decision-making → accidental or infrequent exposure. High awareness (70% familiar) coexists with widespread exposure (80% ever purchased) and substantial unintentionality (nearly 50% unknowingly) because awareness without precision normalises risk rather than deterring it. Consumers adapt pragmatically, negotiating authenticity based on context and constraint. In such an environment, reducing counterfeit circulation is less about changing attitudes and more about making authenticity visible, verifiable, and harder to bypass at the moment decisions are made.

The pattern reads like opportunism rather than identity that many consumers are not committed counterfeit buyers, they are situational buyers responding to a perceived bargain. This finding suggests warning labels, verification prompts, seller reputation cues, and audits can meaningfully reduce demand because the behaviour is not deeply entrenched.

Purchased Counterfeit Products, Frequency of Purchasing Counterfeit Products, Reasons of Purchasing Counterfeit Products



5.4 Channels of Sale and Distribution

The study shows street markets are perceived by consumers as expected counterfeit zones (buyers enter with guarded expectations), while ease of access to big online marketplaces may override caution, particularly in trusted retail or e-platform environments. Across the full range of purchase environments reflected in the survey including street markets, local neighbourhood shops, organised retail stores, e-commerce platforms, and social media or messaging-based sellers, awareness of counterfeit risk is highest for informal street markets and lowest for organised retail and major online platforms. This gradient in perceived risk suggests that consumers continue to rely on place-based “rules of thumb”, treating physical informality as a proxy for danger and formal/known infrastructure (whether physical or online) a proxy for legitimacy, even though counterfeit circulation is reported across all channels.

This difference shapes the “unknowing purchase” problem. In street markets, the potential purchase of counterfeits can be semi anticipated, whereas online purchase of counterfeit products can be accidental at scale, driven by convenience and

trust in platform infrastructure. Purchase behaviour data reinforces this distinction: nearly half of respondents who have purchased counterfeits report doing so through street markets (50% used vs. 63% aware), indicating a relatively narrow gap between awareness and use. Although the numerical awareness–usage gap is identical (13%) across street markets and online marketplaces (45% used vs. 58% aware), the behavioural interpretation differs because awareness operates at different stages of decision-making.

In street markets, awareness is anticipatory and shapes entry behaviour; in online marketplaces, awareness is abstract and system-level, allowing convenience and platform trust to override deterrence. Organised retail exhibits a similar pattern (33% used vs. 48% aware). Social media platforms present a different profile altogether, with high awareness (62%) but markedly lower reported usage (36%), suggesting that while risk is recognised, purchase may be constrained by trust, payment, or visibility factors.



In the case of online marketplaces, nearly six in ten respondents acknowledge that counterfeit products are sold on these platforms, yet almost three-quarters of this group still report having purchased counterfeits. This suggests that knowledge of risk does not necessarily translate into avoidance.

This pattern is evident across demographic segments, but is particularly pronounced among younger consumers and Tier 1 city respondents, who report higher trust in platform infrastructure and branded interfaces. Cross-tabulation by age suggests that Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more likely to associate counterfeit risk with street markets than with e-commerce platforms. By contrast, older consumers (45+) display more uniform scepticism across channels, indicating a more cautious baseline approach to authenticity regardless of point of sale.

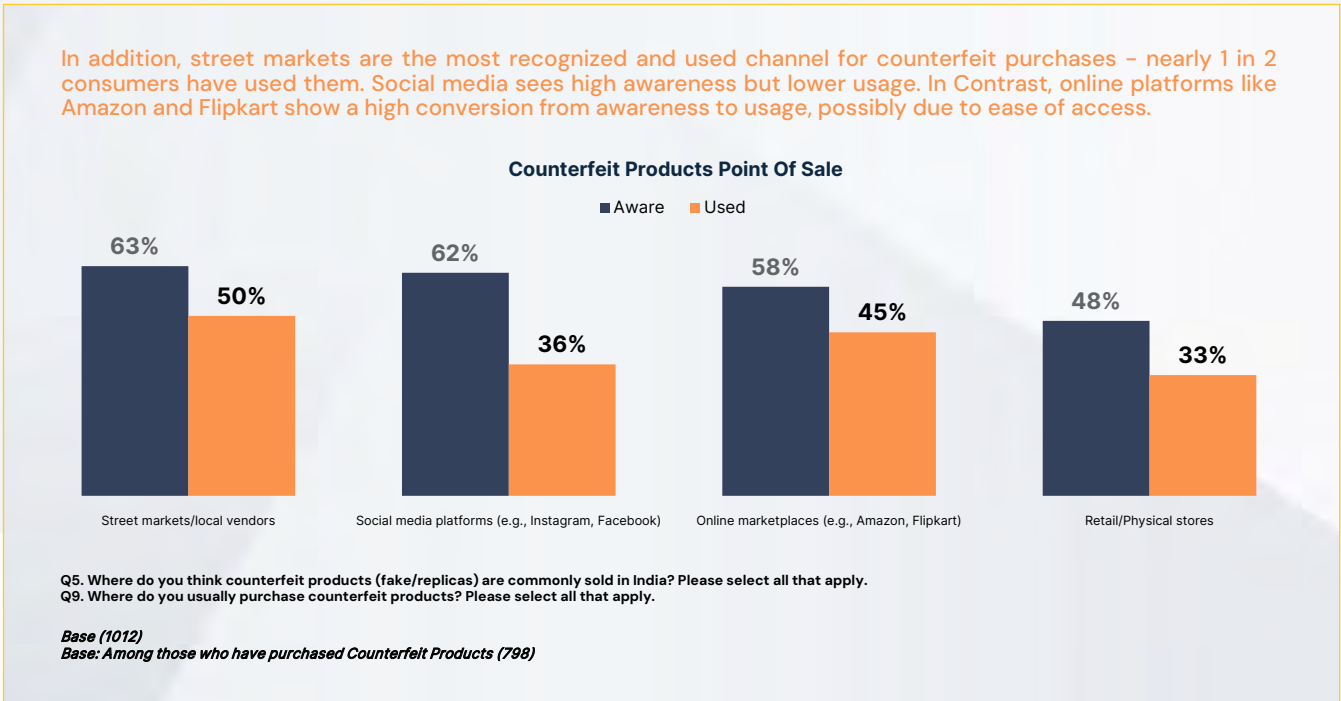
Unknowing purchases are disproportionately concentrated in online environments, particularly among Tier 1 and Tier 2 city respondents, where

organised retail and e-platform sales dominate daily consumption. In Tier 3 cities, by contrast, counterfeit purchases are more often described as price-driven and semi-aware, reflecting familiarity with informal retail norms rather than convenience and misplaced trust.

Gender-based disaggregation further suggests that women are more likely to report unintentional counterfeit purchases in categories such as cosmetics and consumer goods via online platforms, while men report higher unintentional exposure in electronics, aligning with category-specific consumption and channel behaviour rather than differences in risk awareness.

63% aware, **50% purchasing**
—street markets remain primary counterfeit source

Counterfeit Products Point of Sale Awareness, Counterfeit Products Point of Sale Purchase



Age, gender-based category and channel-by-intent insights are derived from cross-tabulation of respondent-level awareness and purchase variables in the YouGov raw dataset.

5.5 Health and Safety Risk Perception

Concern about health risks from counterfeit products is widespread, but uneven across categories, reflecting how consumers perceive immediacy and severity of harm. The highest levels of concern are associated with products that involve direct ingestion or bodily impact. Food and beverages rank highest, with 71% of respondents reporting concern, closely followed by pharmaceuticals at 70%. The study's finding is consistent with the global public health framing of falsified medical products. WHO⁶⁶ has warned that substandard and falsified medicines can cause treatment failure, serious illness, and death, and has estimated that 1 in 10 medicines in low and middle income countries failed quality tests in earlier assessments. These categories appear to be intuitively understood as high-risk.

Cosmetics and consumer goods, which involve repeated skin contact, also attract elevated concern, reported by 65% of respondents as being risk concerns.

By contrast, concern levels decline for categories where harm is perceived as less immediate or less visible. Electronic products register concern among 55% of respondents, and automobile accessories among 54%, indicating moderate awareness of safety risks but weaker emotional salience compared to ingestible or contact-based products. Notably, children's toys record the lowest level of concern at 50%, despite their close association with vulnerable users. This relatively lower concern suggests a potential gap in consumer understanding of risk pathways, particularly where harm may be indirect, delayed, or less frequently discussed or highlighted in the media.

Disaggregated analysis by age cohort shows that concern increases with age. Older consumers (45+ years) consistently report higher concern across all categories, aligning with greater risk aversion and accumulated experience with health-



25–44 years age demographic show strong concern for counterfeit pharmaceuticals, food and beverages, and cosmetics, reflecting household responsibility and routine purchasing roles.

related consequences. The 25–44 years age demographic show strong concern for counterfeit pharmaceuticals, food and beverages, and cosmetics, reflecting household responsibility and routine purchasing roles.

Younger consumers (18–24 years), while aware of counterfeit risks, report comparatively lower concern for categories such as electronics and automobile accessories, suggesting that perceived personal distance from harm moderates risk sensitivity.

In terms of gender, women report higher concern for counterfeit cosmetics and consumer goods,



70% of consumers are most concerned about health risks from counterfeit Food & Beverages and Pharmaceuticals, indicating strong awareness, likely due to the immediacy of harm.

as well as for food and beverages, consistent with higher category usage and greater exposure to allergic or skin-related outcomes. Men, by contrast, report relatively higher concern for electronics and automobile accessories, aligning with category-specific consumption and familiarity

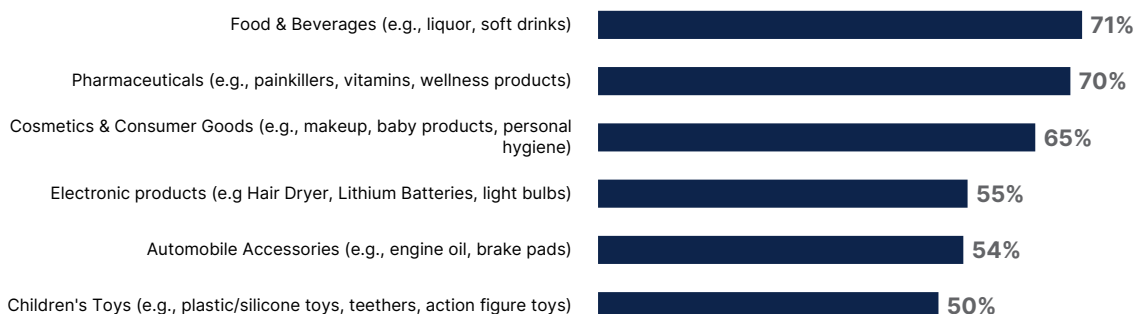
with mechanical or performance-related risks. For pharmaceuticals, concern levels are high across genders, suggesting a broadly shared understanding of potential danger regardless of consumption patterns.

Concern About Health Risks from Counterfeit Products

7 in 10 consumers are most concerned about health risks from counterfeit Food & Beverages and Pharmaceuticals, reflecting strong awareness of their dangers. Concerns are lower for Electronic products and Automobile Accessories, likely due to less immediate risk perception. Notably, the lowest concern is for Children's Toys, highlighting a potential gap in consumer awareness.

YouGov

Concern About Health Risks from Counterfeit Products



Q13_T2B. How concerned are you about the potential health risks of counterfeit products (fake/replicas)?
(Rate each on a scale of 1-5, where 1 = Not very concerned, 5 = Very concerned)

Base (1012)



Notably, all concerns are significantly higher among older consumers and those living in Tier 1 cities.

5.6 Experienced Health and Safety Impacts

Over half of respondents (54%) reported that they or someone they know has experienced health or safety issues caused directly by counterfeit products. A further 25% report never having encountered such issues, while 20% indicate uncertainty. Taken together, the data indicates that adverse outcomes linked to counterfeit products are neither rare nor isolated, but embedded within everyday consumption environments.

Cosmetics and consumer goods account for the largest concern at 44%, followed by food and beverages at 38% and pharmaceuticals at 34%. These categories share a common feature: repeated bodily contact or ingestion, where harm can manifest quickly and visibly. Electronic products (31%), children's toys (25%), and automobile accessories (22%) are reported less frequently, reflecting either lower exposure or harms that are less immediately recognised or attributed to counterfeit origin.

What Consumers Say...



One of my friend bought a fake replica of dairy milk, it looked similar to the original chocolate, but after eating it he experienced stomach ache, headache and had to rush hospital for the treatment."



"One of my relatives bought a cosmetic cream from a street vendor seemingly from a very reputed brand a couple of months back. It turned out to be a cheap fake. When he started using it he developed serious skin rashes and had to undergo medical treatment for curing the same.."



"My friends mother purchased few painkillers for her but after consuming she started vomiting and red rashes appeared on all her body .she was immediately admitted to hospital and it was diagnosed that it was due to her fake medicine."



Its a diabetes medicine.... It happens around 1 year ago.... After eating medicine red colour was occurred in hands and other sides of the body and we went to hospital and take precautions.."



"A few years ago, my cousin bought a pair of Beats headphones online from a popular shopping site during the holiday season. The price was much lower than usual — around ₹9,000 when the original ones cost more than ₹20,000. It seemed like a great deal, so he placed the order. When the headphones arrived, they looked real at first — same logo, box, and even a user manual. But after just a few days, the sound quality got worse, and one side stopped working completely. He later checked at a store and found out they were fake. The serial number was wrong, and small things like the logo placement and plastic quality were slightly off. In the end, he lost ₹9,000 and couldn't return the product because the seller had vanished. Since then, he only buys expensive items from trusted shops or official websites, even if the price is higher. It was a tough lesson about fake products and online shopping."

QUESTIONS TO CONSUMERS / RESPONDENTS:

Describe an incident where you, a friend, or a family member were affected by purchasing a counterfeit product (fake/replicas). What item was bought, when did it happen, and what was the consequence?

Allergic reactions are the most frequently reported health outcome (63%), aligning closely with high exposure to cosmetics, personal care items, and food products. More acute or mechanical harms are also present: 40% report physical injury such as cuts, burns, or choking, while 39% report treatment failure or worsening conditions, particularly relevant in pharmaceutical contexts. Poisoning or toxic effects are reported by 34% of consumers, indicating that a significant share of harms involve systemic health risks rather than minor discomfort.

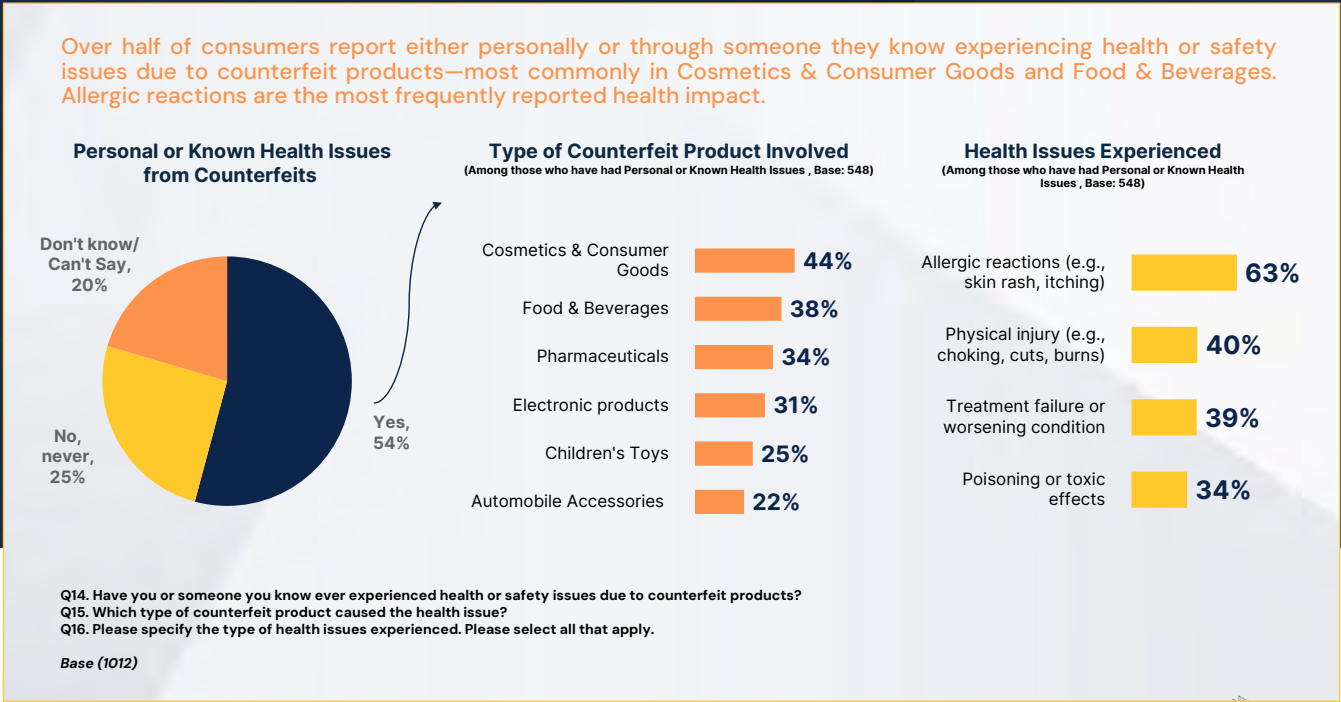
Taken together, the data suggests that counterfeit harm follows patterns of everyday use rather than

fringe behaviour. High reported incidence (54% personal or known experience), concentration in contact and ingestion-based categories (44% cosmetics, 38% food, 34% pharmaceuticals), and a dominance of allergic and systemic effects (63% allergic reactions, 34% toxic effects) point to a consumer environment where counterfeit exposure frequently intersects with health. In this context, consumer education efforts may be more effective if they move beyond general warnings toward clear guidance on post-purchase verification, symptom recognition, and reporting pathways, particularly in categories where harm is most immediate and recurrent.

These quantitative findings are reinforced by consumer narratives documenting hospitalisation, allergic reactions, and financial loss. These narratives highlight why consumer education should include proactive next steps such as where to verify as well as where to report counterfeit products post-purchase, rather than solely “beware of fakes.”



Personal or Known Health Issues from Counterfeits, Type of Counterfeit Product Involved, Health Issues Experienced



5.7 Perceptions of Criminality and Organised Crime

While a large share of respondents agree that counterfeit products endanger consumers (62%), fewer than half initially recognise the sale of counterfeits as illegal unless this is explicitly stated (44%). This divergence suggests that counterfeiting is often framed in public understanding as an economic “market issue” rather than a type of “criminality”.

44%
of respondents

recognise the sale
of counterfeits as
illegal only when
explicitly stated



When the study introduces a clear definition of organised crime, agreement with the criminal character of counterfeiting rises markedly across all segments, with 56% in overall agreement that organised crime groups are involved in the manufacture, distribution, and sale of counterfeit products.

Taken together the studies findings indicate that counterfeiting occupies an ambiguous cognitive space for many consumers: harmful, but not instinctively criminal. This misclassification may have practical consequences. It may lower the likelihood of reporting, weakens informal social sanctions, and reduces public pressure for criminal enforcement. The fact that agreement rises once organised crime is explicitly defined underscores

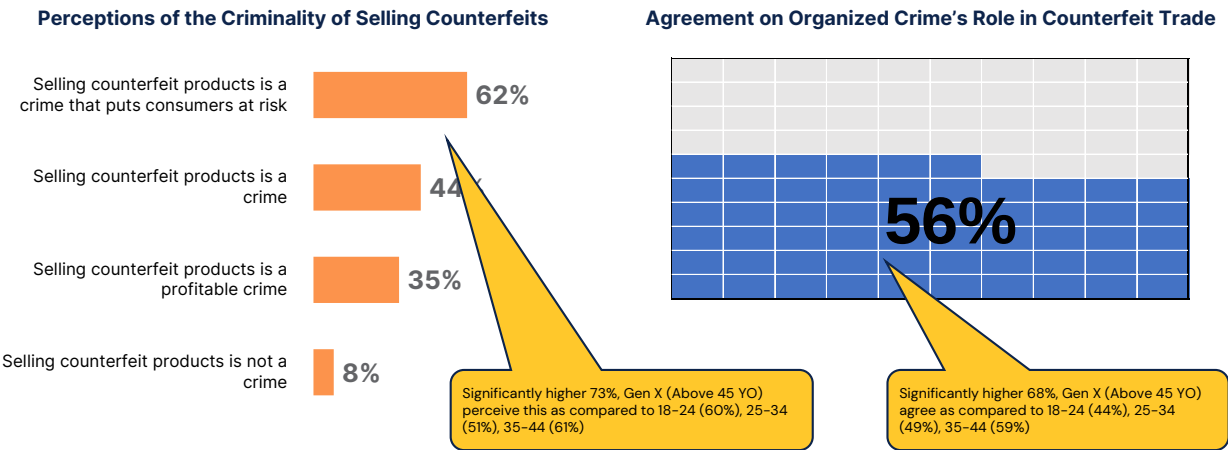


Taken together the study's findings indicate that counterfeiting occupies an ambiguous cognitive space for many consumers: harmful, but not instinctively criminal.

the importance of ‘naming and framing’. This aligns with global enforcement perspectives. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has repeatedly noted that trafficking in counterfeit goods carries serious economic and public health consequences and that its links to transnational organised crime are frequently underestimated or overlooked.⁶⁷

Perceptions of the Criminality of Selling Counterfeits, Agreement on Organised Crime's Role in Counterfeit Trade

3 in 5 agree that selling counterfeits endangers consumers, yet less than 50% are unable to identify it as illegal act unless explicitly explained. This points to a knowledge gap regarding the serious, structured nature of counterfeit operations. YouGov



Q20. Do you agree with any of the following? Please select all that apply.
Q21. With the definition of Organised Crime being "Any group having some manner of a formalized structure and whose primary objective is to commit one or more serious crimes or offences in order to obtain a financial or other material benefit". Do you agree that organised crime groups are involved in the manufacture, distribution and sale of counterfeit products?
Base (1012)



06

Consumer Protection and Market Integrity: Pathways for Strengthened Governance

Consumer Protection and Market Integrity: Pathways for Strengthened Governance



Counterfeiting in India has evolved into a complex consumer risk that intersects public safety, market confidence, and long-term industrial growth. While the issue has often been discussed in economic or intellectual property terms, the evidence presented in this study underscores its broader implications for everyday consumer well-being. Counterfeit medicines, spurious liquor, unsafe toys, and sub-standard automobile and electronic components have been associated with serious injuries, hospitalisations, and, in some cases, fatalities. The YouGov study reinforces this reality, indicating that nearly four in five urban consumers have encountered counterfeit products at least once, frequently without awareness at the point of purchase.



India's legal and regulatory framework addressing counterfeiting is well-established. However, the findings of this report suggest that the challenge lies less in the absence of law and more in the coordination, visibility, and consistency of enforcement across jurisdictions and channels. Enforcement actions have historically focused on raids, seizures, and episodic interventions.

Recent research conducted by IP House, Media Partners Asia (MPA), and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) highlights the wider economic and consumer benefits of effective intellectual property protection. More importantly, when extended to physical goods, consistent and intelligence-led enforcement has the potential to



The findings of this report suggest that the challenge lies less in the absence of law and more in the coordination, visibility, and consistency of enforcement across jurisdictions and channels.



materially reduce consumer exposure to unsafe and harmful products. For enforcement to operate as a meaningful deterrent, systemic enhancements are required particularly in specialisation, intelligence sharing, and public visibility.

One area of opportunity lies in the development of specialised intellectual property and consumer safety task forces, enabling focused expertise on high-risk counterfeit categories. Collaboration between enforcement agencies and technical brand specialists during investigations can improve product authentication, strengthen evidentiary standards, and support more effective prosecutions, without placing undue burden on any single stakeholder.

Equally important is intelligence integration. At present, data relating to seizures, investigations, and prosecutions is dispersed across state police forces, customs authorities, and sectoral regulators such as food and drug administrations. Enhancing inter-agency coordination would significantly strengthen enforcement outcomes by enabling real-time intelligence sharing, reducing duplication of effort, identifying repeat offenders and organised networks more effectively, and facilitating faster, evidence-based prosecutions.

Deterrence Requires Visibility. Counterfeiters thrive on the perception of low risk. Publicising major seizures, arrests, and prosecutions through mainstream media and digital platforms not only signals risk to counterfeit operators but also raises consumer awareness about the dangers of counterfeit goods. Raids must not remain footnotes in police reports; they should be positioned as public safety victories.

6.1 Consumers and Behavioural Change

The study also highlights the central role of consumer behaviour in shaping counterfeit demand. Even where harm is experienced, a proportion of consumers continue to tolerate or overlook counterfeit purchases, often driven by affordability, convenience, or resignation. Addressing this pattern requires a gradual shift from passive awareness to active vigilance.

Consumer education campaigns can also encourage safer purchasing choices, particularly for high-risk product categories. Government and private sector campaigns to better explain consumer risks associated with purchasing from unauthorised or informal channels such as street markets for medicines, food products, or safety-critical goods, should be encouraged. The study shows that counterfeit purchases are often normalised through peer networks and informal reassurance. Encouraging open conversations within families, communities, and online groups can help counter this normalisation. When peer influence is redirected toward caution and accountability, it can function as a powerful informal deterrent.



Table 4: Consumer Insights and Implications

THEME	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
Consumer Response	63% of respondents reported discontinuing use or reporting counterfeit purchases; 36% reported accepting, ignoring, or continuing use	A significant proportion of consumers still tolerate counterfeit exposure, indicating scope for targeted behaviour-change interventions
Health Concerns	68% expressed high concern for counterfeit Food & Beverages; 69% for Pharmaceuticals; concern levels were lower for Children's Toys	Risk perception varies by category, with notable underestimation of harm in certain safety-critical segments
Health Impact	54% reported experiencing health or safety issues personally or through someone they know	Counterfeit-related harm is already present in lived consumer experience rather than remaining theoretical
Criminal Perception	62% agreed that selling counterfeit products endangers consumers; 56% agreed that organised criminal networks are involved	Explicit framing of counterfeiting as a criminal activity increases recognition of its seriousness
Behavioural Trends	45% reported purchasing counterfeits through online marketplaces; 50% through street markets	Both digital and physical channels contribute materially to counterfeit exposure, requiring multi-channel responses
Information Sources	Friends, social media, and healthcare professionals were cited more frequently than formal enforcement channels	Informal information pathways strongly shape consumer perceptions and decision-making
Responsibility Perception	71% believe government should strengthen enforcement; 70% believe brands should educate consumers; 65% believe consumers themselves have responsibility	Broad support exists for a shared-responsibility model involving government, industry, and consumers



“

The counterfeit trade thrives because it feeds on gaps in enforcement, blind spots in awareness, and compromises in consumer choice. Closing these gaps will not only protect markets but safeguard lives. The true measure of success will come when buying food, medicines, toys, or auto parts in India no longer carries a hidden risk—when trust in everyday products is restored, and safety is no longer negotiable.

56%
of respondents

agreed that organised criminal networks are involved in selling counterfeits

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that reducing counterfeit risk in India is less about isolated interventions and more about alignment between enforcement agencies, industry, platforms, and consumers. Incremental improvements in coordination, intelligence, visibility, and consumer empowerment can cumulatively shift both supply-side incentives and demand-side behaviour. Over time, such an approach can restore consumer trust in everyday products and strengthen consumer safety without disrupting legitimate commerce.

Annexures

Annexures

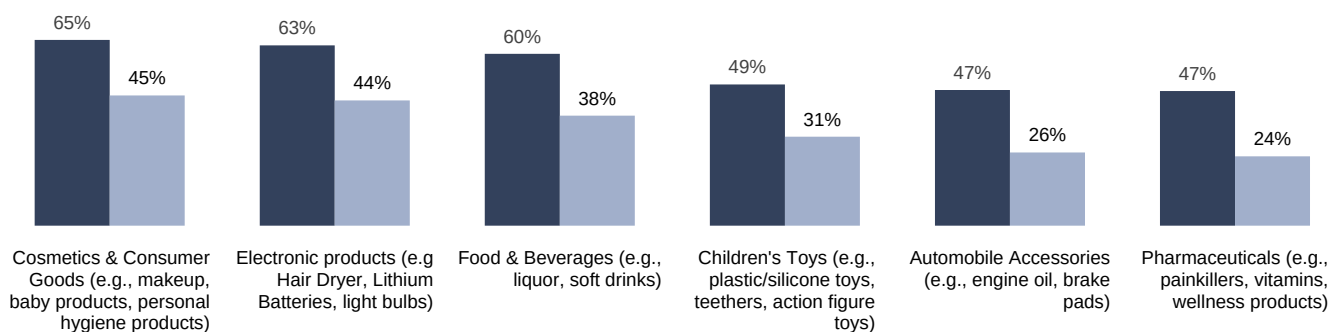
Annexure 1: Consumer Insights on Counterfeit Products

THEME	KEY FINDINGS
Corrective Action Taken	63% discontinue use or report counterfeit purchases 36% accept/ignore the problem.
Consumer Concerns	7 in 10 most concerned about health risks from counterfeit Food & Beverages and Pharmaceuticals. - Lowest concern for Children's Toys.
Health Issues Experienced	Over 50% personally impacted (or know someone affected) by counterfeit-related health/safety issues, especially in Cosmetics, Consumer Goods, and Food & Beverages.
Links to Organized Crime	62% agree selling counterfeits endangers consumers 56% agree organized crime is behind the industry. - WIPO survey (2022, SEA region): only 28% firmly believed crime gangs are behind counterfeits 42% thought "some" involvement.
Consumer Behaviour	- Post-COVID, online counterfeit purchases grew. - WIPO survey: 64% bought at least one counterfeit online 20% knowingly purchased 51% purchased without knowing authenticity.
Perceptions of Harm	77% acknowledge counterfeit cosmetics/healthcare products may cause harm. 74% agree counterfeit food/drinks unsafe. 50% think it's wrong to buy counterfeits.
Sources of Information	- Friends & Family (53%) - Social Media (51%) - Healthcare Professionals (45%) - Official Government Websites (42%) - News Media (41%) - Retailers/Brands (36%).
Public Consensus on Action	~60% say awareness of health risks is essential. 50%+ want better education to identify fakes. - Majority agree on shared responsibility: stronger enforcement, brand-led education, consumer accountability.

Across Categories

Counterfeit Products Awareness and Purchased

■ Aware ■ Purchased



Q3. Which of the below mentioned counterfeit products (fake/replicas) are you aware of? Please select all that apply.
Q8. What types of counterfeit products have you purchased? Please select all that apply.

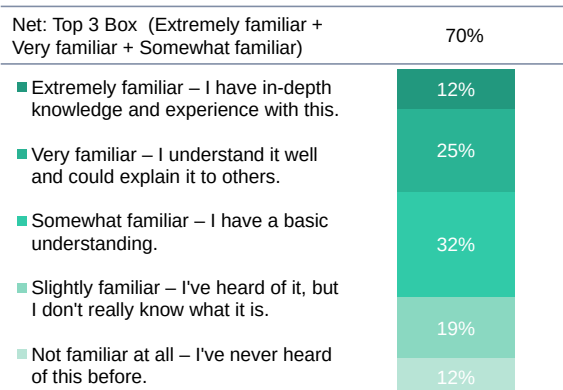
Base (1012)

Base: Among those who have purchased Counterfeit Products (798)

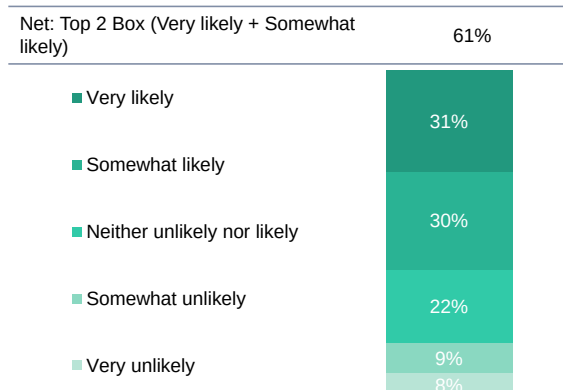


Awareness and purchase of cosmetics and consumer goods is higher among females (69%, 54%) as compared to males (61%, 38%) while awareness and purchase of electronic products is higher among males (67%, 49%) as compared to females (59%, 38%).

Familiarity With Counterfeit Products



Counterfeit Product Commonality in India

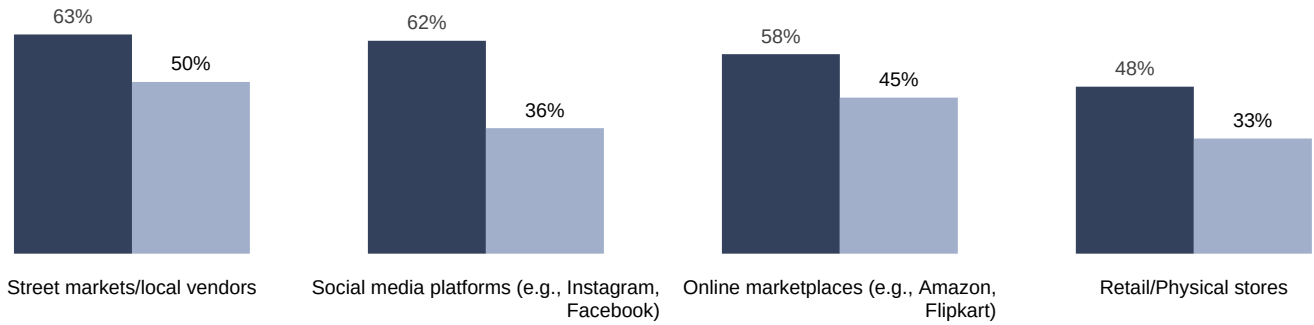


Q1. How familiar are you with counterfeit products (fake/replicas)?

Q2. How likely do you think counterfeit products (fake/replicas) are commonly found in India?

Counterfeit Products Point Of Sale

■ Aware ■ Used



Counterfeit Products Point Of Sale	Purchased Counterfeit Products	
	Yes, knowingly	Yes, unknowingly
<i>Base (Among those who have purchased Counterfeit Products)</i>	366	432
Street markets/local vendors	44%	54%
Online marketplaces (e.g., Amazon, Flipkart)	50%	41%
Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook)	44%	30%
Retail/Physical stores	33%	33%

Annexure 2: Documented Counterfeit Incidents Resulting in Fatalities in India (2016–2026)

A. PHARMACEUTICALS & HEALTHCARE PRODUCTS				
CASE	LOCATION & YEAR	INCIDENT	LOSS TO HUMAN LIFE	SOURCE
Counterfeit Cancer Drug Case	Delhi (2025)	Fake oncology drugs infiltrated supply chain	At least 1 confirmed fatality	https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/delhi/2025/fake-cancer-drugs-case
Toxic Cough Syrup Incident	Madhya Pradesh (2025)	Contaminated cough syrup consumed by children	17 child deaths	https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-toxic-cough-syrup-deaths-2025
Contaminated Syrup Case	J&K (2020)	Poisonous cough syrup distributed locally	12+ child deaths	https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/india/jammu-kashmir-cough-syrup-deaths-2020
Fake COVID Medicine Racket	Hyderabad (2020)	Counterfeit COVID medicines circulated during pandemic	Fatalities unclear, high-risk exposure	https://counterfeitrepository.com/hyderabad-fake-covid-medicine-racket
B. COUNTERFEIT / ILLICIT ALCOHOL (HIGHEST FATALITY SEGMENT)				
CASE	LOCATION & YEAR	INCIDENT	LOSS TO HUMAN LIFE	SOURCE
Kallakurichi Hooch Tragedy	Tamil Nadu (2024)	Methanol-laced illicit liquor	69 deaths	https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/kallakurichi-hooch-tragedy-2024
Bihar Hooch Tragedy	Bihar (2025)	Illicit liquor using toxic chemicals	25+ deaths	https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bihar-hooch-tragedy-2025
Botad Liquor Tragedy	Gujarat (2022)	Industrial methanol used in counterfeit alcohol	40+ deaths	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-62300000
Aligarh Hooch Tragedy	Uttar Pradesh (2021)	Large-scale illicit liquor distribution	80+ deaths	https://www.amarujala.com/uttar-pradesh/aligarh-hooch-tragedy
Uttar Pradesh Methanol Case	Uttar Pradesh (2021)	Counterfeit liquor poisoning	26 deaths	https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/up-hooch-tragedy-2021
Madhya Pradesh Spurious Liquor Case	Madhya Pradesh (2020)	Illicit liquor consumption	4 deaths	https://counterfeitrepository.com/mp-spurious-liquor-case-2020
National Hooch Fatalities (Aggregate)	India (2019)	Multiple hooch incidents nationwide	250+ deaths (annual)	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-48787674 https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/over-200-dead-in-hooch-tragedies-across-india/article28277076.ece https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/hooch-tragedies-india-deaths-bihar-up-2019-1557583-2019-06-24 https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/over-200-deaths-in-hooch-tragedies-across-india-in-2019-2060224

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C. FOOD & FMCG COUNTERFEITS				
CASE	LOCATION & YEAR	INCIDENT	LOSS TO HUMAN LIFE	SOURCE
Spurious Mustard Oil Case	Punjab (2020)	Adulterated edible oil manufacturing	Fatalities not confirmed; serious health risk	https://counterfeitrepository.com/spurious-mustard-oil-ludhiana
Fake Ghee Networks	Multiple states (2018–2024)	Adulterated dairy products using chemicals/ animal fat	Fatalities underreported	https://counterfeitrepository.com/fake-ghee-racket-india
D. PANDEMIC-ERA COUNTERFEIT HEALTH PRODUCTS (SYSTEMIC RISK)				
CASE	LOCATION & YEAR	INCIDENT	LOSS TO HUMAN LIFE	SOURCE
Fake PPE Kits & Sanitizers	Pan-India (2020)	Substandard PPE kits supplied during COVID	Indirect fatality risk (healthcare exposure)	https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/fake-ppe-kits-india-2020
Fake Masks & Medical Supplies	Multiple states (2020)	Counterfeit safety gear flooding markets	Infection exposure risk	https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/fake-masks-sanitizers-india-2020

Annexure 3: Ten-Year Overview of Counterfeit Crime Incidents by Category

CATEGORY	LOCATION & YEAR	INCIDENT	SOURCE
Pharmaceuticals	Madhya Pradesh (2025)	17 children died after consuming toxic cough syrup 'Coldrif'	https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/india-flags-testing-lapses-pharma-firms-after-cough-syrups-deaths-2025-10-08/
Pharmaceuticals	Srinagar J&K (2020)	Children died after ingesting poisonous chemicalâ€“contaminated cough syrup	https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/trends/health-trends/jk-children-deaths-kids-consumed-cough-syrup-with-poisonous-chemical-probe-reveals-5025511.html
Pharmaceuticals	Uttar Pradesh (2021)	26 deaths caused by toxic counterfeit alcohol	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jL4M8hOFrkc
Pharmaceuticals	PAN-India (2025)	Fake life-saving drugs distributed via multi-state network; 150kg tablets seized	https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/india/fake-drugs-racket-delhi-johnson-johnson-gsk-b2803425.html
Pharmaceuticals	Delhi/HP/UP (2025)	Chalk-pill counterfeit medicines made using chalk powder	https://spoindia.org/news/Chalk-Pills-and-Fake-Labels:-Inside-India%E2%80%99s-Booming-Counterfeit-Medicine-Racket
Pharmaceuticals	Urban India (2026)	28% of medicines in urban pharmacies found counterfeit	https://pharma.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/pharma-industry/counterfeit-medicines-in-india-alarming-28-fake-rate-revealed-in-new-study/129606930
Baby Products	India (2025)	Expired imported baby food relabelled and sold	https://www.lokmatimes.com/national/crime-branch-busts-rs-43-crore-racket-selling-expired-imported-food-with-fake-labels-across-india/
Toys	Delhi (2019)	Lead-poisoning risk; 67% imported toys unsafe	https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/nearly-67-pc-of-imported-toys-are-dangerous-for-kids-qci-survey20191221205027/
Toys	Maharashtra (2025)	BIS seized 367 non-ISI toys sold without safety certification	https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2097412
Cosmetics & Personal Care	India (2018)	Illegal cosmetics worth crores of rupees seized in raids across eight states	https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/illegal-cosmetics-worth-crores-of-rupees-seized-in-raids-across-eight-states-1357955-2018-10-07
Electricals/ Electronics	Bengaluru (2018)	Teen burned after explosion of counterfeit mobile charger	https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2025/Oct/27/bengaluru-mobile-explodes-lands-diabetic-teen-in-hospital
Electricals/ Electronics	Chennai (2016)	Counterfeit charger caused injury	https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/fake-mobile-accesories-may-be-lethal/article8201382.ece
Household Products	Delhi (2018)	Children injured by explosion caused by counterfeit pressure cooker	https://ficci.in/public/storage/SPDocument/20307/FICCI-Anti-piracy-paper.pdf
Cosmetics & Personal Care	Thiruvananthapuram (2025)	Operation Beauty Phase-III prosecuted 12 establishments for counterfeit cosmetics	https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/op-beauty-phase-iii-cases-filed-against-12-establishments/articleshow/118125634.cms

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CATEGORY	LOCATION & YEAR	INCIDENT	SOURCE
Cosmetics & Personal Care	Mumbai (2023)	1.41 crore fake branded cosmetics seized from illegal factories	https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/crime-branch-seizes-1-41-crore-worth-of-equipment-used-to-manufacture-fake-cosmetics-in-mumbai-101686337927714.html
Cosmetics & Personal Care	8 States (2018)	CDSCO raids seized illegal cosmetics with banned chemicals	https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/illegal-cosmetics-worth-crores-of-rupees-seized-in-raids-across-eight-states-1357955-2018-10-07
Electricals/ Electronics	Vadodra (2018)	204, fake power banks seized	https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/vadodara/five-arrested-with-204-fake-powerbanks/articleshow/65693351.cms
Pharmaceuticals	Chandigarh (2023)	counterfeit drugs seized worth ₹4.6 lakh	https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/ut-health-department-busts-counterfeit-drug-racket-selling-fake-antibiotics-of-non-existent-manufacturing-firms-101684458557029.html
Automobile	Delhi (2025)	Fake automobile parts ring busted	https://sundayguardianlive.com/news/delhi-crime-branch-dismantles-counterfeit-auto-parts-operation-2-persons-nabbed-rs-90-lakh-seized20250928150528-152517/
Automobile	Delhi (2026)	Hundreds of counterfeit stickers, brake shoe sets and various cables, including clutch, speed, and brake cables, filters seized	https://www.rediff.com/news/report/counterfeit-auto-parts-ring-busted-in-delhi/20260315.htm

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