There are two reasons to visit Bangkok’s Patpong district, and to look for cheap knock-offs of popular brands is the other one. It’s also probably the only one of the motives that you’ll publicly admit to, as you check out the dirt-cheap Dior and the dime-a-dozen Diesels, none of which will last longer than a politician’s promise. Even at a fraction of the price of the real thing, these shameful and fraudulent phonies are astonishingly poor value.

Criminality – for that is what supplying or buying these counterfeit goods amounts to – always follows the money, or, as a straight-talking Yorkshire colleague of mine used to declare, ‘where there’s muck, there’s brass’. And with leading global brands being worth tens of billions of dollars in goodwill alone, there’s certainly a lot of brass to go round. But if there is any saving grace in this bare-faced piracy it is that there is precious little attempt at subterfuge or smokescreens. The illegality is blatant; the manufacturers know, the sellers know, and the buyers know, and the visceral frisson of excitement that lies just below the surface of every transaction is ironically what sustains the trade - at least in part.

So, much as I resent these brand parasites, I grudgingly acknowledge that through their brazenness they are somehow being honest in their dishonesty. I reserve my true contempt for another set of players in the fake brands ‘industry’ – those marketers (if that’s not too generous a definition) who practise truly exploitative deception, launching products whose only raison d’être is to sow confusion in consumers’ minds by mimicking as closely as the law will allow (and often beyond) all the visual attributes of the market leaders. Their intention is to trick consumers into believing that this is the same brand that they have trusted all along (known as ‘passing off’ in legal circles), in the hope that their ersatz offering will be plucked from the shelf as a brand leader made it to the top under this identity, a second brand can follow suit along an identical path. There isn’t a text book in the world that fails to define marketing as the profitable fulfilment of UNMET needs. I repeat, for the sake of the truly vacuous, that magic adjectival qualifier, unmet needs. Beyond the stupidity, the laziness is equally apparent, stemming as it does from an attitude that targets the brand that has worked the hardest to achieve success in its category in order to take a free ride on its coat-tails for as long as consumer or the law will allow. Creativity? Heaven forbid. Original thinking? Sounds far too much like hard work.

There’s a third reason to condemn these ugly little fake brands, and it’s an insidiously unpleasant one that exploits this country’s social weaknesses and, in particular, our low levels of verbal and graphic literacy. Many consumers in the lower socio-economic sectors have been denied, through no fault of their own, the opportunity to become functionally literate, and are therefore obliged to identify brands instead on the basis of their basic ‘get up’, which would include physical appearance, colour palette, iconography and the like. Any upstart, low-quality brand that mimics these critical visual clues could easily be mistaken for the genuine article, especially by those who are struggling to get by on limited disposable incomes, and thus have the most to lose. It is cynical, exploitative marketing at its worst, and it brings shame on our profession.

One of the essential pillars of a strong and sustainable brand is authenticity. Fake brands, whether blatant or disguised, undermine that fundamental foundation. For the sake of the ongoing faith that consumers have in truly authentic brands, the charlatans must be challenged mercilessly at every opportunity.