

# Man shot for fake Rolex shows the real tragedies around counterfeit merchandise

By [John Davenport](#), issued by [Havas Johannesburg](#)

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In an appallingly tragic incident, a Johannesburg man was shot last week for his Rolex. Which turned out to be fake.

There are several things terribly wrong about this story.

Firstly, wearing a Rolex is, we know, a risk in our country. Poverty, economic desperation and anger at the legacy of apartheid have stoked crime to extreme levels. By wearing a watch like that, one knowingly makes oneself a target. Yet it is a risk people are willing to take in order to impress their friends and colleagues.

When did we reach a point where it is worth risking one's life to appear wealthy? Even *worse* in this case, when did we reach a point where our society is so competitive that ordinary people are prepared to risk their life to appear *wealthier* than they *are*?

Anyway, that's not the main focus of this piece... let me get back on topic...

Status has become so important to us that our streets and malls are awash with fake merchandise. And this has to be bad for us. Every time we put on a fake pair of sneakers, or jewelry or pick up a fake handbag, we are telling ourselves that we aren't good enough. That we are, in some way, failures.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with not being able to afford designer merchandise, but every time we buy a fake we are telling ourselves that we *should* be able to afford the real thing. By wearing it we are, on a daily basis, damaging our self-esteem and negating our worth. We are telling ourselves that we are not as good as we should be. We are building a world of shame in which to live.

There is nothing wrong with not being able to afford a shirt with a crocodile on the pocket. There are dozens of other outlets that sell shirts of perfectly acceptable quality. When we wear the fake, we are stealing from those companies and making ourselves feel bad in the process. Which is, ironically, the opposite of what we are supposed to feel when wearing a luxury brand. Wearing a luxury brand is supposed to make us feel *good* about ourselves. It should be a treat. A reward for hard work. It should make us feel good about ourselves. But when we wear a fake we are doing the opposite. We are subtly and subconsciously making ourselves feel bad, chipping away at our sense of self. In a world where materialism and badly used social media are besieging our self-esteem, we are acting as participating in active psychological self-harm.

Because while others may (or may not) be fooled by the fake, we never are. We know.

Yet our society has become so materialistic and competitive, that we consider this a small price to pay for impressing our peers. How did we end up feeling that material success is the only thing we have to offer the world? That without it we are worthless?

The other thing that this horrendous incident tells us, is that crime spawned by grotesque inequality, is out of control for several reasons.

The inequality in our country is the evil love-child of apartheid. Who was then fed and fattened by the corruption that has crippled the state's efforts to lift people out of the poverty into which apartheid threw them.

Schools, toilets, textbooks, electricity, job-creation. All of these things should be making people's lives better. But the loot-a-

thon has made sure these efforts are stillborn. Because corruption hurts us all, but it hurts the poor the most. And fuels the crime that blights our streets.

So the tragic death of one innocent man for a fake watch, may just be one crime statistic amongst many. But maybe it also tells a tragic and intricate story about what is wrong with our society.

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John Davenport is Chief Creative Officer at Havas South Africa.

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