

Consumer Intent and Attitudes about Counterfeit Fashion Products: A Study of Selected Influencing Factors

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that influence consumer attitude and intentions to buy counterfeit products. A conceptual review was done to understand the antecedents and results of counterfeit fashion products' consumption. A questionnaire was designed to trap the responses regarding the demographic variables such as age, gender, education and marital status, and psychographic factors like personality and their relationship with intentions to buy counterfeit fashion products. The questionnaire was administered as the research tool and descriptive statistics and correlation were used to draw significant findings.

The study finds no significant difference in the purchase intentions of males and females as far as counterfeit fashion products are concerned. There is no significant relationship between purchase intention and novelty seeking behaviour. Attitudes towards counterfeits of fashion brands were found to influence purchase intention. Findings also suggest that people who seek uniqueness and those who are susceptible to interpersonal influence are less likely to purchase counterfeit fashion products.

Key Words - counterfeit fashion products, value consciousness, purchase intention, interpersonal influence, novelty seeking, uniqueness

INTRODUCTION

The increase in the number of fashion-conscious consumers because of the proliferation of media has resulted in an increase in demand for fashion products in the market. Moreover, consumer demand is also increasing due to the pursuit of status goods and the desire of being in tune with fashions and fads (Eisend and Schuchert-Güler, 2006). The craze to own brands has, in turn, increased fake or counterfeited replicas of the same in the market.

Fashion products are, as defined by the American Marketing Association (AMA), a subcategory of a

shopping product which contains items that are wanted by consumers for their fashion aspect. These include consumer goods where style holds the primary importance, and the price is secondary. Such goods include clothing, jewelry, handbags, sun shades, and shoes.

Counterfeits of brands are commonly defined as the reproduction or a replicated version of the genuine article, usually of a well-known trademarked brand. The copy resembles the genuine article in details such as packaging, colour, labelling, and trademark so as to pass off as the genuine (Anget al., 2001). Luxury brands are more vulnerable targets to

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counterfeiters as they are popular with consumers (Shultz and Soporito, 1996).

Availability of the counterfeited fashion products like clothes, footwear, belts, wallets, bags, belts, watches, etc. at a much lower price than the original versions has prompted the consumers, who otherwise cannot afford to buy the original brands, to buy them. Commonly, consumers purchasing counterfeits of luxury brands are willing to pay for the visual attributes and functions without paying for the associated quality (Cordell et al., 1996). Apart from economic reasons, there are other factors too that influence the purchase behaviour of the consumers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies by Anget et al. (2001), Tan (2002) and Kwong et al. (2003) on counterfeit software i.e. pirated software have found that males have more positive attitudes towards piracy than females. Similarly when purchase intention of technical items is concerned the relationship between buying and using behavior is stronger amongst men than women (Moore and Chang, 2006). As far as fashion products are concerned females are more likely to be heavy buyers of pirated clothing and accessories (Cheung and Prendergast, 2006). However, Bloch et al. (1993) state that demographic variables do not distinguish between the choice groups and there is no significant difference for demographics as far as a counterfeit purchase is concerned. So, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a definite impact of gender on the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products

According to the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), the purchase behaviour is determined by the purchase intention, which is in turn determined by attitudes (Ajzen, 1991). When consumers have a more favourable attitude towards counterfeiting, chances are higher that they will purchase counterfeit brands. Similarly, if they hold unfavourable attitudes towards counterfeiting, the less are the chances of purchase (Wee et al., 1995). It is therefore postulated that:

H2: Consumers with positive attitudes towards counterfeits of fashion brands have a higher intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion brands.

Value consciousness is defined as the concern for paying lower prices for products but subjected to some quality constraints (Lichtenstein et al., 1990). A lower price with a slightly substandard quality is still considered value for money (Wang et al., 2005). Consumers who purchase genuine luxury brands pursue value for brand, prestige and image benefits, but at the same time may be unwilling to pay the high price for it (Bloch et al., 1993). As the counterfeited products are priced much less than the original versions, consumers perceive counterfeits of luxury brands as "value for money" (Furnham and Valgeirsson, 2007). Hence people who are value conscious are inclined to have a positive attitude towards counterfeit fashion products. Phau and Teah (2009) suggest that there is a significant relationship between consumers' level of value consciousness and their likelihood of buying counterfeit luxury brands, suggesting that value-conscious consumers may see counterfeit products as a better deal than the actual status brand. Thus, it can be postulated that:

H3: Value consciousness has a positive influence on attitudes towards counterfeits of fashion brands

Gentry et al. (2001) say that counterfeits provide novelty. Novelty seeking is the curiosity of individuals to seek variety and difference (Wang et al., 2005). Since the counterfeit products are cheaper, therefore, there is less price related risk. This encourages the consumers to try new things and hence the low cost of counterfeit products are well suited to satisfy their curiosity and the need for experimentation (Wee et al., 1995). However, a study by Phau and Teah (2009) asserts that novelty seeking has no significant relationship towards attitudes of counterfeit products. Similarly brand status, materialism, novelty seeking, and risk-taking have no influence on the purchase intention and attitudes (Wee et al. 1995). It can be postulated that:

H4: Consumers who are novelty seekers have a positive attitude towards counterfeits of fashion brands

A limited supply of products enhances the consumers' value and preference for a brand (Pantazis 1995). Moreover, scarcity of products has an even greater effect on demand if people also perceive the product as unique, popular and expensive (Verhallen and Robben, 1994). Since the counterfeits of fashion brands are available

abundantly people who seek uniqueness and rarity are likely to hold negative intentions to purchase counterfeits. Therefore it can be postulated:

H5: Desire for uniqueness has a negative influence on intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion brands

Publicly self-conscious individuals are especially concerned about the impression they make on others (Bush et al., 1989). They succumb to interpersonal influences and are more likely to be concerned about physical appearances and fashion. They are also more compliant with standards in society and are more sensitive to interpersonal rejections. Depending on their social group norm, the pressure from a reference group can induce the consumer's decision to use original or counterfeits of luxury brands (Bearden et al., 1989). Consumers are assumed to look for congruence between product attributes and their self-image (Solomon, 2009). They tend to choose and buy products whose characteristics match their own to impress important other people and show their identity through the product image (Triandewi and Tjiptono, 2013). People buy fashion products to satiate their fashion cravings and also to show off their possessions. Studies suggest that consumers form positive attitudes toward things that help them define their social and personal identities by expressing who they are, who they want to be and how they want others to see them (Shavitt, 1989). Fashion-related goods, as well as clothing, may be an especially effective product category in this regard (O'Cass, 2001). Hence we postulate:

H6: Susceptibility to interpersonal influence has a negative influence on intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion brands

METHODOLOGY

The overall objectives of the paper are

- (1) to find out the relationship between consumer attitude and their intentions to purchase counterfeit fashion products,
- (2) to find out the relationship between gender and intentions to purchase counterfeits,

- (3) to ascertain the relationship between value consciousness and attitudes towards counterfeit products,
- (4) to find out the relationship between novelty seeking behaviour and attitude towards counterfeit products,
- (5) to find out the relationship between the desire for uniqueness and intentions to purchase counterfeits and,
- (6) to find the relationship between consumer's susceptibility to interpersonal influence and their intentions to purchase counterfeit fashion products.

The sample for the study consists of 94 respondents from Ajmer and Jaipur city. However, 100 questionnaires were administered initially but 6 questionnaires were discarded as they were incomplete. Convenience sampling was used to reach the respondents. Questions were asked regarding the demographics of the respondents, their attitudes towards counterfeit products, intentions to purchase counterfeits, desire for uniqueness in them, novelty seeking and value consciousness. Questions were also asked to ascertain the susceptibility to interpersonal influence in the consumers. In order to design the questionnaire, established scales were adapted viz. 4 item scale for novelty seeking by Craig and Ginter (1975); 8 item scale to measure the desire for unique consumer products by Lynn and Harris (1997); 12 item scale to measure consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence by Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989); and 7 item scale to measure value consciousness by Lichtenstein, Netemeyer and Burton (1990). All the statements were positively worded therefore no reverse scoring was required. Data were analyzed using SPSS 20.

FINDINGS

The sample age ranged from 20-28 years. 44.7 % of the sample comprised of females and 55.3 % were male respondents. Background profile of the sample (n=94) is presented in table 1.

Table 1 : Background Profile of the Sample

| S. No. | Background Variable | Number | Percent |
|--------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1. | Age | | |
| | 20 | 01 | 1.10 |
| | 21 | 05 | 5.30 |
| | 22 | 08 | 8.50 |
| | 23 | 19 | 20.2 |
| | 24 | 20 | 21.3 |
| | 25 | 19 | 20.2 |
| | 26 | 13 | 13.8 |
| | 27 | 07 | 7.40 |
| | 28 | 02 | 2.10 |
| | Total: | 94 | 100.00 |
| 2. | Gender | | |
| | Male | 52 | 55.3% |
| | Female | 42 | 44.7% |
| | Total: | 94 | 100.00 |
| 3. | Educational Background | | |
| | Graduate | 47 | 50.0% |
| | Under-Graduate | 25 | 26.6% |
| | Post-Graduate | 22 | 23.4% |
| | Total: | 94 | 100.00 |
| 4. | Occupation | | |
| | Government Employee | 04 | 04.3% |
| | Private Employee | 20 | 21.3% |
| | Student | 58 | 61.7% |
| | Self Employed | 02 | 02.1% |
| | Unemployed | 10 | 10.6% |
| | Total: | 94 | 100.00 |

Cronbach alpha was used to find out the internal consistency of the data. It was decided to accept a scale to be reliable if the value of Cronbach Alpha was equal to (or greater than) 0.60. Cronbach Alpha for the scale of 'value consciousness', 'novelty seeking', 'desire for unique consumer products' and 'consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence' was found to be 0.179, 0.921, 0.930 and 0.966 respectively. The variable 'value consciousness' was eventually dropped as the Cronbach alpha was found to be quite less than the desired level. Hence H3 was also dropped and could not be tested.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H1: There is a definite impact of gender on the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products

In order to know whether there is any significant difference in the intention of males and females to purchase counterfeit fashion products, chi-square was applied to the collected data. Table 2 and 3 show the results. Since the value of $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.577$) therefore we cannot reject the hypothesis. The result indicates that gender does not have a significant impact on intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products.

Table 2

| Intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products and gender (Cross-tabulation) | | | | |
|---|-----|--------|------|-------|
| Count | | | | |
| | | Gender | | Total |
| | | Female | Male | |
| Intention | No | 21 | 29 | 50 |
| | Yes | 21 | 23 | 44 |
| Total | | 42 | 52 | 94 |

Table 3 : Chi-Square Tests

| Chi-Square Tests | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | .311 ^a | 1 | .577 | | |
| Continuity Correction ^b | .122 | 1 | .727 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | .311 | 1 | .577 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .678 | .363 |
| N of Valid Cases | 94 | | | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.66.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

H2: Consumers with positive attitudes towards counterfeits of fashion brands have a higher intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion brands. As per the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), the purchase behaviour is determined by the purchase intention, which in turn is determined by attitudes. Questions like

“counterfeits of fashion brands are as reliable as the original version” and “counterfeits of fashion brands provide similar functions as the original version”, etc. were asked to know the attitude of consumers towards counterfeit fashion products. Table 4 shows that there is a high positive correlation of 0.922 between positive attitudes towards

counterfeits of fashion products and intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion brands. Hence we accept the hypothesis. This indicates that people

who hold a positive attitude towards counterfeits are more likely to purchase them.

Table 4

| | | Correlations | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Attitude | Intention | Novelty Seeking | Desire for uniqueness | Interpersonal influence |
| Attitude | Pearson Correlation | 1 | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | |
| | N | 94 | | | | |
| Intention | Pearson Correlation | .922** | 1 | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | | | |
| | N | 94 | 94 | | | |
| Novelty Seeking | Pearson Correlation | -.028 | -.087 | 1 | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .786 | .405 | | | |
| | N | 94 | 94 | 94 | | |
| Desire for uniqueness | Pearson Correlation | -.883** | -.892** | .066 | 1 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .530 | | |
| | N | 94 | 94 | 94 | 94 | |
| Interpersonal influence | Pearson Correlation | -.827** | -.847** | .123 | .944** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .236 | .000 | |
| | N | 94 | 94 | 94 | 94 | 94 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H3: Value consciousness has a positive influence on attitudes towards counterfeits of fashion brands

Since the Cronbach alpha for the scale of “value consciousness” ($\alpha = 0.179$) was found much less than the desired value (0.60), therefore the variable was dropped and the hypothesis could not be tested and hence relationship could not be ascertained between value consciousness and attitudes towards counterfeit fashion products.

H4: Consumers who are novelty seekers have a positive attitude towards counterfeits of fashion brands

Questions like "I like to experiment with new ways of doing things" and "When I see a new brand on the shelf, I often buy it just to see what it's like", etc were asked to check the novelty-seeking behaviour of the consumers. A very weak negative correlation of 0.028 was found (refer table 4), therefore we cannot accept the hypothesis.

H5: Desire for uniqueness has a negative influence on intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion brands

In order to detect the desire for unique products in consumers, questions like "I am very attracted to rare objects", "I am more likely to buy a product if it is scarce" and "I rarely turn down the opportunity to order custom features on the product I buy", etc. were asked. Results show that there a high negative correlation of 0.892 (refer table 4) between the desire for uniqueness and intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion brands. Therefore we accept the hypothesis.

H6: Susceptibility to interpersonal influence has a negative influence on intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion brands.

Susceptibility to interpersonal influence has long been established to have an influence on consumer decision making towards purchase intentions. In order to determine whether the consumer is susceptible to interpersonal influence or not, questions like "I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class", "If I want to be like someone I often try to buy the same brands that they buy", "It is important that others like products and brands I buy" and "When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of", etc. were asked. It was found that people who are susceptible to interpersonal influence are less intended to purchase counterfeit fashion products. Table 4 shows that there is a high negative correlation between susceptibility to interpersonal influence and intention to purchase counterfeits of fashion products, therefore we accept the hypothesis.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Through this study, we find that gender has no influence on the purchase intention of counterfeit fashion products. Previous studies have reported some differences in the intentions of males and females as far as technical products like pirated software and CDs are concerned. However despite the fact that markets are loaded with more female fashion products and females do form a major segment for fashion products, there is no difference in their intentions to purchase counterfeit fashion products as compared to males.

Theories have proven that attitudes are antecedents to intentions. Positive attitudes towards a product or service are likely to lead towards positive purchase intentions. We too, in this study, find a positive relationship between attitude and intentions.

The correlations indicate that there is a weak negative correlation between novelty seeking behavior and attitude towards counterfeits. It may be attributed to the fact that people who seek novelty may not buy counterfeit fashion products. Novelty seekers who want to experiment but with a less price risk may hold a positive attitude towards counterfeits, however, those who believe in exclusiveness along with novelty may have a negative attitude towards counterfeit fashion products. Brand consciousness also influences

attitudes, however, its impact has not been studied in the present study.

The desire for unique consumer products is found to have a high negative correlation with intentions to purchase counterfeit fashion products. It can be attributed to the fact that counterfeits are duplicates of luxury brands and are available in abundance in the markets. Therefore they lack uniqueness. This discourages the consumers, who seek uniqueness and exclusiveness, to purchase them.

People who purchase counterfeit fashion products are always at risk of embarrassment on being exposed in public. Therefore people who are susceptible to interpersonal influence have negative intentions to purchase counterfeit fashion products. Results of the study also support the same. People who are conscious about their public image and concerned about their interpersonal intermediaries' view will avoid any such embarrassing situations.

Despite its contributions, the current study has some limitations too. The results are based on the assumption of non-deceptive counterfeiting, i.e. purchase where consumers recognize the product as a copy, therefore results cannot be ascertained for deceptive counterfeiting where consumers are unaware of the copy. Another is the issue of generalization due to the sampling method used i.e. convenience sampling method, the limited number of samples, limited geographical scope and research methods (i.e. survey instead of experiments). Further research could be designed to minimize these weaknesses.

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