Inside Asia's love affair with counterfeit - a framework of counterfeit luxury consumption value in China

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Abstract

Given that the market for counterfeits relies on consumers' desire for real brand, the paper is one of the few which investigate counterfeit as a brand (a copy one). Based on the luxury value perception theory and the literature review on motive for luxury counterfeit consumption, the main contribution of this study is to explore a multidimensional framework of counterfeit value. A set of key drivers of perceived value which include all relevant current and potential value source of the consumers' counterfeit perception was identified.

Key words: Counterfeit, luxury, value, China.

Introduction

The significant growth of luxury consumption over the past years has been accompanied with a dramatical rise of counterfeit. Consumer decisions to purchase fakes instead of originals have developed into a worldwide crisis. China has been acknowledged as the famous "made in" for counterfeit products, where all type of fake can be traced (Bian & Veloutsou, 2007; Cheung & Prendergast, 2006; Hung, 2003). These products lay over a vast range of goods including apparel electronics, foodstuff, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics products, and others. In particular, as the Chinese are avid consumers of luxury goods (Li & Su, 2007; Sonmez & Yang, 2005; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998), the counterfeit of luxury brands has reached astronomical levels. Chinese consumers behave more irrationally in luxury purchase because luxury brands are something "must to have" for them. It is therefore interesting to study the eastern consumer's counterfeit brand behavior in a Confucian society context.

Previous research has examined a number of different drivers that push consumers towards counterfeits. Past studies focused on perceived price benefits (e.g.(Albers-Miller, 1999; Bloch, Bush, & Campbell, 1993), product characteristic (e.g. Cordell et al, 1996; Penz and Stöttinger, 2008a, Wee et al, 1995), demographic variables (e.g. Solomon and O'Brien, 1991), social influences (e.g. Ang et al, 2001) or psychographic characteristics of the buyer (e.g. Cordell et al., 1996, Penz and Stöttinger, 2005, Swinyard et al., 1990, Wee et al., 1995). However, a clear concept of consumer who intentionally purchase counterfeit and the perceived value as motivational driver of this kind of consumer is still missing.

Given that the market for counterfeit luxury brands relies on consumer's desire for real luxury brands (Hoe et al, 2003; Penz and Stöttinger, 2005), the paper attempts to establish a model which could measure the various motives of luxury counterfeit consumption and the multiple facets of value perceived by consumers from the existing value –based luxury scales.

This study aims to provide new insights into the theoretical understanding of consumption of counterfeit luxury goods. The connection of luxury brand and counterfeit luxury brand will be highlighted that help to reduce the complexity of counterfeit consumption and enrich the literature.

Theoretical background

Counterfeit Definition

Generally the brand of an enterprise is its most valuable asset. But the success of a brand may cause counterfeiting (Maldonado & Hume, 2005). The history of counterfeit brands of luxury products goes back to A.D. 27. In that period, the wine Merchant Gaul filled wine bottle with cheap local wine and sold them as expensive Roman wines. Around 19th century, the counterfeits of valuable trademarks became wider and counterfeiting became a crime that requires punishment in some European countries (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009).

As with any topic, there are various interpretations of the basic concept for the area of counterfeiting study. Kay (1990)'s defined counterfeiting as the production of copies that are identically packaged, including trademarks and labeling, so as to seem to a consumer that the item is the genuine article. Bloch, Bush, and Campbell (1993) defined counterfeiting as the unauthorized copying of trademarked or copyrighted goods. In the work of Cordell, Wongtada, and Kieschnick (1996), the product counterfeiting is defined as any manufacturing of goods whose special characteristics are protected as intellectual property rights. Eisend and Schuchert-Culer (2006) viewed counterfeiting as meaning that an original product with a remarkable brand value worth copying already existed on the market; the product attributes were copied into another product, which was indistinguishable from the original, and was sold at a lower price as if it were the original. For this study, the definition of Eisend and Schuchert-Culer was used because this definition highlights the key component of a luxury counterfeit: that the characteristics of copied product are identical to the genuine and the original brand value is involved.

From the consumer's perspective, the literature has identified two forms of counterfeiting, as deceptive and non-deceptive. Under deceptive counterfeiting, the consumer is a victim of deception, they are not aware of purchasing a fake product. In our study, we specifically focus on non-deceptive counterfeit product, where consumers intentionally purchase fake products (Grossman & Shapiro, 1988). This form of counterfeiting is more

commonplace in luxury brand markets (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000), where consumers are often able to distinguish counterfeits from genuine brands based on differences in price, the distribution channels, and the inferior quality of the product itself.

Luxury Brand And Counterfeit Luxury Brand Relevance

Among the many product categories that could be counterfeited, one of the most counterfeited products is luxury item(Grossman & Shapiro, 1988). The brand is always associated with the counterfeiting, because a counterfeited luxury brand must copy an existed famous trademarked brand(Cordell, Kieschnick, & Wongtada, 1996); meanwhile, a successful brand should have the highest attractiveness level to counterfeiters. In fact, according to a website statistic, the most desirable brands for Chinese consumers are LV, Gucci and Burberry. The trademark Louis Vuitton turn into the primary target of counterfeiters, which can be abundantly found in street markets, small shops, flea markets, and through web selling.

In the context of non-deceptive counterfeiting, few studies argued that the decision to buy a counterfeit not only represents a product choice, but also represents a brand decision (Eisend & Schuchert-Güler, 2006; Gentry, 2006). Since the quality of counterfeit products has been steadily improving over the years, some counterfeits are recognized as the same quality, same design and even better durability than the originals. Turunen and Laaksonen (2011) indicate that the perceived authenticity of luxury product is the major difference to counterfeit product. The counterfeit is regarded as the pursuit of luxury by imitating its attributes, but it is can be also placed on the brand level. From this point of view, the concept of luxury itself could play an important role in counterfeit consumption.

Counterfeit can be viewed as a substitute of luxury for some consumers. Empirical evidence found that people who decide on the basis of what would impress others are more likely to purchase luxury counterfeit (Phau and Teah, 2009). Wilcox et al (2008) found out that image-driven consumers showed a higher tendency to purchase logo exposed counterfeits. These lead to the assumption that consumers motivated by social reasons are more likely to choose counterfeit since both fakes and originals provide social benefits, but the counterfeit superior in price. Therefore, in addition to the socially oriented counterfeit brand consumption, a personally oriented type of consumption has been considered recently. Several researches suggest that the experience of buying and consuming luxury and counterfeit luxury product are both pleasant (Nia and Zaichkowsky, 2000; Perez et al., 2010; Jiang and Cova, 2012). The process of purchasing and consumption is fun and enjoyable, a much cheaper counterfeit represent a smart choice that made additional happiness for

consumers. Just as the luxury consumption, social orientation and personal orientation need to be considered in counterfeit-related research. However, the motives for counterfeit brand consumption are not simply due to a set of social and personal factors that include status, impressing others, and hedonic needs; they also depend on the financial reason that those consumers are not willing to spend much money in such product, and functional factors such as the logo visibility.

Thus, a comprehensive model which includes all relevant dimensions – psychological, social and functional needs that constitute the non-deceptive consumers' perception is still missing. Considering the brand aspect of counterfeit, it is important to apply the existing luxury value dimensions into the counterfeit value framework.

Counterfeit value dimension

With regard to consumption values that directly explain why consumers choose a particular good (Sheth, Newman, and Gross, 1991), all relevant present and potential value sources could influence consumer's purchase decision. Vigneron and Johnson (2004) argued that the concept of luxury value is made up by five factors: perceived conspicuousness, perceived uniqueness, perceived quality (non-personal oriented perception), perceived extended self and perceived hedonism (personal oriented perception). Inspired by their work, Wiedmann et al.,(2007) then proposed a multidimensional framework of consumers' perceived luxury value. Their empirical study in 2009 determined a three dimension model of luxury value: functional, social, and individual.

When two products look alike, such as counterfeit brand and its real counterpart, they are often perceived as being similar (Shocker et al., 2004). However, even the copy physically resembles the original as closely as possible, the customer couldn't receive a same benefit from the counterfeit, such as quality and price. The purchase motivation for a counterfeit or an original luxury brand can't be the same. Thus, the value perception of luxury and their counterpart can't be evaluated in the same way. Bloch (1993, p.31) states that "people buy counterfeit because they are getting prestige without paying for it". Price represents an obvious advantage for the counterfeit; however, quality and durability were the key contributes for the originals. Thus, the functional value should be considerate another way from the dimension of luxury value perception. Moreover, several researchers found that culture would be an important factor that influences consumers' behavior. Under the influence of a thousand years' history of Confucian culture, several culture value such as concern for

face has seepage in each corners of life for Chinese consumers. The culturally specific values should be also taken into account for the counterfeit value framework.

In order to understand the consumer motivation and value perceptions in counterfeit luxury brand consumption, by inspired the Vigneron and Johnson's five dimension framework, and Wiedmann et al.'s model, we define in this paper the consumer's perception through four latent counterfeit luxury value dimensions: Personal/interpersonal as well as financial/functional dimensions.

Financial dimension refers to the value of the product expressed in monetary aspects, and to what is given up to get a product (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

Functional dimension refers to the product benefits and utilities. (Sheth, Newman & Gross, 1991).

Personal dimension focus on customer's personal orientation towards counterfeit luxury consumption such as hedonism (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Tsai, 2005) and materialism (Belk, 1984; Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Interpersonal dimension refers to the perceived utility individuals acquire with products of services recognized within their social groups, such as conspicuousness (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004) and conformity (Lascu and Zinkhan, 1999).

Conceptual Model: Determinants of Consumer's Counterfeit value perception

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual model for investigating the correlated luxury counterfeit value dimensions. Vigneron and Johnson (1990) indicate the luxury perceived value can act independently from one another. And each consumer can apply his/her own personal combination of functional, social and individual factors in their luxury value perception. This can also be applied to the counterfeit value framework, where two products can both result as having a high value, but one of them depend more on envy value and the other depend on fashion. Thus, the proposed counterfeit value dimension operate independently, they interact with each other and have various influences on counterfeit consumption that can be help to define different market segments.

Figure 1. The conceptual model

Price value

Counterfeits are always sold at a lower price, even the quality can't be equivalent to the original product, and they are still considered value for money (Bloch et al., 1993; Ang et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2005). The importance of price is undisputed in the literature. Since the quality of counterfeit has gradually improved, counterfeits luxury products usually provide the same functional benefits as the original. Thus, is can be suggested that the low price is perceived as financial value.

P1: The perceived price is positively related to the financial counterfeit luxury value perception.

Visibility value

The brand conspicuousness is manifested by its logo. Wilcox et al (2008) found out that consumers showed a higher tendency to purchase logo exposed counterfeits. Prominent brand logos help consumers to associate with brand and fulfill their self-presentational goals. The logo visibility seems to be important for those consumers of counterfeit. Thus:

P2a: The perceived level of logo visibility is positively related to the functional counterfeit luxury value perception.

Fashion value

Researchers have referred to fashion-conscious consumers as those individuals who are characterized by a deeper interest in fashion brands and products as well as in their physical appearance (Gutman & Mills, 1982; Summers, 1970). As the appearance and visibility are particularly sold for fashion items, and the majority respondents felt that the visual brand cue is important rather than any intrinsic feature of the item itself. Since the fashion item is always relative with a short product life cycle, they have to go out of fashion after a certain period. Buying a much cheaper counterfeit version may therefore be an acceptable way to stay up to date and show tastes for those consumers. Thus:

P2b: The perceived level of fashion is positively related to the functional counterfeit luxury value perception.

Self-directed pleasure value

Snell et al., (1995) investigated a notion of self-directed pleasure in the form of consumers' hedonic experience, that this kind of emotion is spontaneous, intense, and self-determined. Studies in luxury consumption have shown that luxury products are likely to provide such intrinsic enjoyment (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; Tsai, 2005). For non-deceptive counterfeit consumption, a few studies found the enjoyment and pleasure also emerged as important themes during the consumption (Gistri et al., 2009; Perez et al., 2010). As a specific product, the copy that has an illegal nature may provide a memorable and amusing experience to consumers who intentionally purchase fake. Therefore, it is proposed that:

P3a: The consumer's perceived level of self-directed pleasure is positively related to the personal counterfeit luxury value perception.

Envy value

Envy is considered as a subscale of materialism, which involves a desire for others' possession (Belk, 1985). The topic of materialism has been recently studied in the counterfeit consumption (Furnham and Valgeirssons, 2007; Phau et al., 2009). The researchers consider counterfeit product could served as consumers' lower cost means of satisfying their materialistic need, but they have not yet obtained satisfactory results. The reason could be due to the product specificity and the different scale choice. Materialism is regarded as an important driver of luxury consumption for the reason that materialistic possessions could serve to display individual's wealth and signal one's status (Belk, 1985; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998). Given that the market for counterfeit luxury brands relies on consumer's desire for real

luxury brands (Hoe et al, 2003; Penz and Stöttinger, 2005), the consumers without financial capacity who willing to achieve their aspirations represent a luxury brand envy value :

P3b: The perceived envy is positively related to the personal counterfeit luxury value perception.

Conspicuousness value

Luxury brand often enclose prestige and status constructions; conspicuousness consumption plays a significant role in luxury consumption (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann et al., 2007). Given that, the status goods are acquired for their symbolic values and less for their functional values (Barnett, 2005), individuals who wish to be seen belonging to a higher social class but unable to afford the originals, will return to the counterfeit, regardless of ethical standing (Wee et al., 1995). In agreement with Wee et al., (1995), Perez et al., (2010), and among others, by pretending as the users of luxury brand goods, the consumers' counterfeit consumption depends on the need of the social image created by the luxury goods. Thus, the following hypotheses are presented:

P4a: The perceived conspicuousness is positively related to the interpersonal counterfeit luxury value perception.

Face value

Face refers to a sense of favorable social self-image that a person wants others to obtain in a relational and network context. Face contributes to people's socially defined aspect of self, which is usually considered as tightly related to Chinese culture (Chan et al., 2009; Yau, 1988). Maintaining face is regarded as an important goal in social interactions (White et al., 2004). Prior research in consumer behavior shows that face pressure represents an important driver of luxury consumption in China (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). The influence of face value on counterfeit purchase manifests in two different ways (Sharma & Chan, 2011): saving face in public prompt consumers to buy and use counterfeits of well-known luxury brands; a social risk of losing face may happened if the copy is recognized by others.

P4b: The perceived face is positively related to the interpersonal counterfeit luxury value perception.

Conformity value

Be part of the Confucianism, the conformist is one of the most important social factors, influencing the individual and social behavior in China. The Chinese culture has traditionally intensified the level of social behavior over the personal, and therefore strengthened the social influence on individual behavior. The social necessity of luxury brand is much more important than a privately necessity of product (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Wilcox (2011) indicates that counterfeit can serve individuals an adaptive social function that rewarding the consumers with certain social acceptance. Individual without financial capacity to be similar to the peers or social group, a counterfeit of luxury good could help them to auto-classify themselves as one of the luxury brand user, and therefore be able to conform to their social groups. Thus:

P4c: The perceived conformity is positively related to the interpersonal counterfeit luxury value perception.

Limitation, Contribution and Future Research

In order to understand consumer behavior, consumer's perception and decision-making processes is extremely important, this helps marketers determine factors influencing consumers buying process (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997), so the primary goal of this study is to establish a multidimensional value framework that explains consumers' motivation towards counterfeit luxury goods. The research contributes to the existing literature by extending the counterfeit as a brand perspective-which results in providing a model of counterfeit luxury value perception from the theory of their counterpart, the original luxury brand models.

Based on the theory of perceived value dimensions for luxury consumption, and a literature review on motives of counterfeit consumption, we proposed that counterfeit luxury brand perception is not only affected by the low price (financial value), but also by functional, personal and interpersonal value. Additionally, we identified the relevant drivers of different value aspect. By including all the existing research in the area of non-deceptive counterfeit purchase behavior, we contribute to propose two new perceived drivers in exploring the conceptualization of counterfeit value construct: face consciousness and envy. The face consciousness is showed as a double-edged sword, which may both promote and inhibit

counterfeit purchase behavior in different situations. Envy is due to the counterfeit consumer's initial desire for real brand.

This is only a first step towards conceptualizing the dimension of consumers' counterfeit luxury value, the framework presented in Figure 1 which structured by inspiring from the luxury theory seems to be able to identify the market segmentation for counterfeit luxury goods. Even though consumers are buying for varied reasons, their basic motives of buying behavior seemed to be the same: the financial, functional, personal and interpersonal dimensions of counterfeit value perception. Therefore, future step is to empirically test the model in using qualitative (exploratory interview) as well as quantitative research methods (survey).

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