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Identifying moderators of brand attachment for driving customer purchase intention of original vs counterfeits of luxury brands

Hans Ruediger Kaufmann^{a,*}, Dan Alex Petrovici^b, Cid Gonçalves Filho^c, Adriano Ayres^c

^a University of Applied Management Studies Mannheim, Germany

^b Kent Business School, University of Kent, United Kingdom

^c Universidade Fumec, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Few studies have examined the relationships between brands and consumers in the context of counterfeiting. In this context, this research aims to explore how the attachment of a consumer with a luxury brand can affect her/his decision to buy counterfeits, and how this relates to her/his public self-consciousness. Two survey based studies were conducted among potential counterfeit buyers in Brazil. A sample of middle-class female fashion shoppers from Brazil was used to test the hypotheses in study 1 ($n = 532$) and study 2 ($n = 276$). Innovatively, this research provides convincing implications for the need to differentiate counterfeiting theory between emerging and developed economies. Evidence of the positive impact of actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence on brand attachment to luxury brands in emerging economies is provided. The role of brand attachment is in contrast to findings reported in other emerging economies. Interestingly, the results demonstrate that the purchase of counterfeits is a more hedonic process compared to the purchase of originals (study 1). The effect of brand attachment on the willingness to buy counterfeits may vary according to how attachment is measured (study 2). Yet, brand attachment has a consistent positive effect on intentions to purchase originals. Producing increments in the emotional brand attachment level can reduce the behavioural intentions of purchasing counterfeits. Hence, the findings suggest that the creation of emotional links with brands can be an appropriate strategy to reduce counterfeiting.

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1. Introduction

The luxury industry has a significant share in the global market of luxury brands growing from about 90 million consumers in 1995 up to 330 million in 2013 (Bain e Company, 2013). Brazil represents an attractive market for luxury entrepreneurs, capturing investments of US\$ 2 billion a year Modesto (2007) notwithstanding the national culture of Brazil thwarting entrepreneurial behaviour (Woodside, Bernal, & Conduras, 2015). Brazil is the eighth country in the world considering losses in tax revenues amounting to US \$ 15 billion each year (Havocscope, 2016).

A significant challenge for luxury brands remains the growing number of companies that are counterfeiting and creating a parallel or shadow market (Kapferer & Michaut, 2014). Yoo and Lee (2005) define counterfeiting as the practice of manufacturing or selling products using a brand owner's trademark without the permission or the trademark owner's oversight. Usually, these goods are cheaper and inferior in quality. While counterfeits may stimulate demand in

an economy (Givon, Mahajan, & Muller, 1995) and provide social status and symbolism at a fraction of the original cost (Nia & Zaichowsky, 2000), counterfeit products mislead consumers by making them believe that they are an original brand (Kim, Cho, & Johnson, 2009). Hence, counterfeit products bring serious economic losses for the original luxury brands.

While the growth of luxury markets is caused by emerging countries (Kapferer & Michaut, 2014), most of the research about counterfeiting was carried out in developed economies (Eisend & Schuchert-Guler, 2006; Staake, Thiesse, & Fleisch, 2009). According to OECD (2007) studies, counterfeiting differs among countries due to a series of factors (e.g. how local government deal and combat piracy). Sheth (2011) outlines five characteristics of emerging markets (heterogeneity, sociopolitical governance, chronic shortage of resources, unbranded competition and inadequate infrastructure) that are fundamentally different from the traditional industrialized economies. Yet, the speed of transformation has been somewhat too high for the enforcement agencies and many countries are now emerging as both large producers and consumers of fakes with counterfeiting being also considered a source of income for the population and a form of transference of technology (Staake et al., 2009).

Previous studies show significant differences between low and high income buyers of counterfeits in emerging economies, where the income

* Corresponding author at: University of Applied Management Studies Mannheim, P.O. Box 240364, Neckarauer Street, 68173 Mannheim, Germany.

E-mail address: hans-ruediger.kaufmann@hdwm.org (H.R. Kaufmann).

differences are higher than in developed countries (Bacha, Strehlau, & Strehlau, 2013; Gambim & Nogani, 2013). In the same vein, Hennigs et al. (2013) compared ten different nations in a large survey that included Brazil, United States, India and Germany, exploring luxury products. They observed that the importance of the above mentioned factors is significantly different among these countries confirming the need for conceptual differentiation.

An urgent need for more research on the relative importance of determinants of counterfeiting and the effect on individuals and the economy is noted (Bosworth, 2006; Yoo & Lee, 2012). This research aims to cover a still existing knowledge gap on the antecedents of purchasing counterfeited luxury products in emerging economies. Whilst counterfeiting is seen as a global phenomenon (Europol, 2015), the BRIC countries of Brazil (Provedel, 2009), Russia (Salmik, 2011), India (Europol, 2015) and, especially, China (Yao, 2006) exhibit a concerning high large scale production of counterfeited products. As emerging countries offer a higher level of vertical social mobility, a potential positive effect of counterfeits is seen in that they may actually advertise the sales of the original brand (Qian, 2008, in Kapferer & Michaut, 2014). However, this might alienate more exclusive clients, as indicated by Kapferer and Michaut (2014, p.61): “A sense of exclusivity thus is of paramount importance, but this sense gets diminished by the multiplication of wearers of the same logo, real or fake, such that aspirational consumers might abandon widespread brands – a negative externality of the growth of counterfeits”. In this context, Manser (2013) points to a still existing research gap in explaining purchasing behaviour of counterfeit luxury products in emerging economies. Manser (2013) suggests to differentiate behavioural patterns within cultures (i.e. between China and other Asian cultures), across cultures and, going beyond cultures, also between individual countries in emerging markets.

Eisend and Schuchert-Guler (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of 29 empirical studies about counterfeiting and observed that only two studies have focused on particular brands within a product category (Leisen & Nill, 2001; Yoo & Lee, 2005). They also observe that research was mostly conducted with consumers from Asia or North America. Most studies relate to different product categories and only few are related to luxury brands (Mourad & Vallete-Florence, 2011). Many studies on counterfeiting examine its effect on brand evaluation of the original brand. These studies overlook the effect of a brand on the intention to purchase originals and counterfeits (Commuri, 2009; Cademan, Henriksson, & Nyqvist, 2012; Hieke, 2010; Nia & Zaichowsky, 2000).

With some exceptions (Randhawa, Calantone, & Vorhees, 2015; Raza, Ahad, Shafqat, Aurangzaib, & Rizwan, 2014), there is sparse knowledge on the role of brand attachment on purchasing intentions of counterfeits. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) proposed a scale of consumer emotional attachment to brands but acknowledged a need to test the generalizability of the scale by using non-student samples. This paper tests the role of their scale in the context of purchasing behaviour towards counterfeits based on data from a more homogenous population of consumers. The data is likely to display therefore a larger scale variance. A need to evaluate the dimensionality of brand attachment, given that two scenarios of single and second-order factors were proposed in the literature (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci 2010), is also highlighted.

In summary, notwithstanding the importance of brands on consumer behaviour, there is gap involving the influence of brand (more specifically brand attachment and brand self-congruence) on the purchasing of counterfeits and originals. A lack of studies on luxury markets in emerging economies is also noticeable.

This work is innovative in this field exploring how personal and brand-related factors, including two alternative measures of brand attachment, affect purchase intentions of brands and counterfeits in the emerging market of Brazil. In other words, the paper expands Yoo's and Lee's (2009) framework of consumer purchasing behaviour of counterfeits by integrating the role of public self-consciousness, actual and ideal self-congruence (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011)

and attachment to luxury brands (Park et al., 2010). Thus the paper includes a wide range of personal as well as, so far, overlooked brand-related factors in providing an improved understanding of purchasing behaviour towards counterfeits vis-a-vis original brands. A very comprehensive and conscientious literature review points out that this paper innovatively measures the impact of two ways of measuring brand attachment on purchasing counterfeits. The relationship of this latter concept with types of self and purchasing behaviour of counterfeits and originals is considered. Finally, the paper fills a knowledge gap on purchasing behaviour of counterfeits in emerging economies.

The objectives of the paper are: i) to explore the role of types of perceived benefits of buying counterfeits and consumer characteristics on purchasing intentions of original luxury brands and their counterfeits; ii) to investigate how brand attachment impacts these purchasing intentions; iii) to test the moderating role of product involvement, self-esteem and public self-consciousness in the relationships between ideal, actual self-congruence and brand attachment. An evaluation of whether the effects of brand attachment on behavioural intentions are dependent on how attachment is measured will be undertaken.

2. Conceptual underpinning and hypotheses development

The first stream of research on counterfeits focused on supply factors (Bamosy & Scammon, 1985). In subsequent research the focus shifted to demand factors (Nia & Zaichowsky, 2000; Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009). While past studies emphasized price and quality in understanding purchasing behaviour of counterfeits (Cordell, Wongtada, & Kieschnick, 1996), calls are made to move beyond these purely economic antecedents (Poddar, Foreman, Banerjee, & Ellen, 2012).

Eisend and Schuchert-Guler (2006) carried out a first meta-analysis regarding the reasons for why consumers buy and use counterfeits. They identify four categories of factors that influence purchasing behaviour of counterfeits: personal, product-related, social and cultural context, and purchase situation and mood.

Personal factors are reported extensively in the literature (Chakraborty, Allred, & Bristol, 1996; Misbah & Rahman, 2015; Penz & Stöttinger, 2005) and include demographic and psychographic variables such as consumers' income, education, occupation, attitudes and personality traits. Product-related factors are associated with price, product attributes, brand image and scarcity (Jenner & Artun, 2005; Poddar et al., 2012; Wilcox et al., 2009). The social and cultural context category includes factors such as cultural norms (Franses & Lede, 2015) or the extent to which the brand fulfills social goals, as well as the influence of family and friends (Prendergast, Chuen, & Phau, 2002; Wilcox et al., 2009). Purchase situation and mood-related factors (Harvey & Walls, 2003) can moderate the influence of attitudes on intentions (Eisend & Schuchert-Guler, 2006) and provide perceived symbolism associated with a purchase (Gentry, Putrevu, & Schultz, 2006).

The paper is grounded into the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979). According to TRA, attitudes towards performing a behaviour are good predictors of the intention of that specific behaviour. In this study attitudes towards buying counterfeits were found to be driven by hedonic and economic benefits. Hedonic benefits are more subjective and related to issues such as pleasure, personal benefits, self-expression and entertainment (Ahtola, 1985; Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). These attitudes to the hedonic benefits of counterfeits represent a key driver of purchase intentions (Yoo & Lee, 2009). Relative to hedonic benefits, utilitarian benefits are thought to have a greater influence on loyalty towards the originals (Chiu, Hsieh, Chang, & Lee, 2009). Yoo and Lee (2009) hold that consumers, who have more hedonic benefits than utilitarian benefits, will easily accept counterfeiting items. Therefore, these two types of benefits are regarded to be antecedents of intentions to purchase counterfeits.

The attachment theory posits that one's emotional attachment to an object predicts the individual interaction with that object. These

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