Counterfeit Consumption: the Role of Consumers’ Perceived Likelihood of Counterfeit-Detection By Important Others

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Counterfeiting is becoming widespread, developing into a problem of international significance. Attempting to develop a refined understanding of the motivations and decision-making processes of consumers’ deliberate counterfeit-consumption behavior, this research integrates the theory of planned behavior and insights from self-regulatory theories. It also extends these theories by re-conceptualizing the relationships of key constructs in the theory of planned behavior with action desire as well as this research’s newly introduced construct of consumers’ perceived likelihood of counterfeit-detection by important others. Results of this research are expected to support the refined model, thereby enabling the development of effective strategies to decrease consumer consumption of counterfeits.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1009122/volumes/ap09/AP-09

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As more and more consumers are knowingly and overtly purchasing counterfeits—especially in the luxury goods markets (Nie and Zaichkowsky 2000)—branded-goods manufacturers must discourage consumers from purchasing and using counterfeits (Wee et al. 1995). To achieve this end, this research introduces a new construct: consumers’ perceived likelihood of counterfeit-detection by important others (PLCD). The research also examines PLCD’s role in the context of deliberate counterfeit consumption.

With the aim of developing a strong and parsimonious model, we propose that PLCD emerges and should be treated as an important and unique construct in the context of deliberate counterfeit consumption. The PLCD construct’s integrative function derives from its primary antecedents, such as consumption situation of counterfeits, a counterfeit item’s product characteristics, perceived product quality of counterfeits, and important others’ ability to detect the counterfeits. Although having directly or indirectly identified some of these primary antecedents, past studies (for details, see review papers by Eisend and Schuchert-Güler 2006; and Staake, Thiesse, and Fleisch 2009) are mostly exploratory in nature, and more importantly, the relationships among these factors and the mechanisms driving deliberate counterfeit consumption have not been focused on. Separately, these antecedents may be perceived and interpreted differently by different consumers. Together, through counterfeit-brand consumers’ perceptions and the perceptions’ meanings to these consumers, these antecedents are reconciled and transformed into the proposed construct, to perform an integrative function, such as influencing consumers’ action intentions (or behavioral intentions, a term used in the theory of planned behavior).

A great body of research based on the theory of planned behavior suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence decision making (Ajzen 1991). The theory of planned behavior proposes that actions are a direct function of behavioral intention (i.e., action intention from the perspective of goal-directed behavior) and perceived behavioral control; and indirect functions (through behavioral intention) of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Specifically, we focus on and propose two hypotheses relating to the following three constructs: PLCD, action intentions, and subjective norms. First, in hypothesis 1 we propose that PLCD directly and negatively influences action intentions. PLCD reflects a counterfeit-brand consumer’s sense of control over performing the chosen actions. It also contains aspects of self-regulation, as this proposed construct deliberately addresses the question, “How shall I act?” in the context of counterfeit consumption. Furthermore, because consumers considering counterfeits consciously acknowledge important others’ ability to detect their counterfeits, the construct of PLCD can serve as a motivator or inhibitor to act. Therefore, it can directly influence action intentions, without action desire as a mediator (for details regarding the role of action desire, see Bagozzi, Dholakia, and Basuroy 2003).

Second, in hypothesis 2 we propose that subjective norms moderate the relationship between PLCD and action intentions. The more favorable the subjective norms are, the weaker the relation between PLCD and action intentions; the less favorable the subjective norms are, the stronger the relation between PLCD and action intentions.

Our research uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods consisting of in-depth interviews, followed by a self-administered questionnaire to investigate the role of PLCD. The purpose of the interviews is to develop items for measuring the proposed construct, PLCD; in a semi-structured manner, we have conducted eight in-depth interviews among five college students and three consumer behavior researchers.

Next we have developed, will pretest, and will conduct a self-administered paper questionnaire. Direct measures of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are adapted from past literature (e.g., Ajzen 1991; Bagozzi, Dholakia, and Basuroy 2003). The scale for PLCD, developed from the in-depth interviews, consists of six items, such as “Important others around me can detect when I’m wearing a counterfeit product,” “Important others around me will not be able to recognize when I’m wearing a counterfeit product,” and “I myself can detect when important others around me are wearing counterfeits.” The finalized questionnaire in the Chinese version will then be distributed among students of four universities in Beijing, China.

After data collection, items measuring each construct will be subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis. The study will evaluate both discriminant validity and convergent validity before testing the hypotheses. The study will also test and compare its proposed model to the theory of planned behavior.

This research advances our understanding of the underlying dynamics that drive consumers’ deliberate counterfeit-consumption behavior via particularly investigating the role of the proposed construct, PLCD, and comparing the research’s proposed model with the theory of planned behavior. It theoretically extends the theory of planned behavior (1) by identifying an important construct (i.e., PLCD) and PLCD’s corresponding mediating and moderating relationships with other constructs, and (2) via connecting self-regulation to deliberate counterfeit-consumption behavior. Results of this research will provide a clearer understanding of the role of PLCD underlying consumers’ deliberate counterfeit-consumption behavior. Our initial and future results will aid in the development of effective strategies to decrease consumer consumption of counterfeits.
REFERENCES