Perceptions of Counterfeit Product Consumers

Stephanie Oneto, University of Houston

This study explored perceptions of consumers who purchase counterfeit, rather than original, luxury products. Social Identity Theory (SIT) predicts that people will treat other individuals that violate social norms, for instance by purchasing counterfeit products, more favorably when those individuals are members of the in-group as opposed to an out-group. Three hundred and four undergraduate students evaluated a male target on a number of characteristics after reading a brief profile that included information about the target’s race and a type of product (high status, lower status, or counterfeit) the target had recently purchased. Results were consistent with SIT. When respondents rated an in-group targets with a high status product, their evaluations were more favorable than if the target had a low status or counterfeit product. However, respondents rated targets less favorably on all three types of products when the target was an out-group member as opposed to an in-group member.

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Perceptions of Counterfeit Consumers

Stephanie Oneto, University of Houston
Jill M. Sundie, University of Houston

Counterfeit products, such as fake Louis Vuitton handbags and Oakley sunglasses, have become widely available in the marketplace to consumers worldwide. The international trade of counterfeit products has been estimated at over $100 billion per year, or 3-6% of sales overall. As a result, it is estimated that corporations have experienced a global loss of $200 billion both through lost sales and damage to brand equity (Review of Business 2001). Although the magnitude of this phenomenon is staggering, consumer research in this area has remained sparse. The current research aims to being filling this gap.

Consumers often purchase luxury or prestige products for their ability to communicate information regarding their social class, or to indicate their membership in a valued reference group. Previous research has shown that consumers who purchase expensive luxury items often place greater importance on the status or image associated with the product than with the product itself (Dubois and Duequesne 1993). Some consumers of counterfeit luxury products may be attempting to capitalize on the symbolic nature of a prestige brand without paying the premium price. If luxury products and prestige brands convey information about the owners' social status to others, consumers of authentic looking counterfeit products are sending inaccurate information about their social status. Social Identity Theory (SIT) holds...
that people will form negative impressions of individuals deliberately attempting to misrepresent their social status to others. The current research applies SIT to investigate perceptions of individuals that choose to purchase and display counterfeit products.

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) focuses on explaining the dynamics of intergroup relations, and has been applied to better understand the strategies members of low status groups use to increase their status both individually and collectively. According to this theory, people gain self esteem from their membership in social groups, and will pursue goals they believe will increase or maintain the status of their social groups. According to SIT, one way this is manifested is in the evaluations people make of in-group vs. out-group members. Individuals tend to favor or make more positive evaluations of members within their social group (in-group members) than members of other groups. Although the misrepresentation of one’s social status through the purchase of counterfeit products violates social norms, people’s judgments about counterfeit consumers, according to SIT, will depend on whether those counterfeit consumers are in-group or out-group members. This study tested the hypothesis that individuals will make less favorable evaluations of counterfeit consumers when those consumers are members of an out-group, compared to an in-group.

The sample consisted of 304 undergraduate students from a large Southeastern university. Respondents were asked to complete a survey, ostensibly about an online dating service, and evaluate an online dating profile containing a photo of either a Caucasian or African-American male target and information about his hobbies, likes/dislikes, and income. In addition, the passage also contained information about one of three possible products that the target had recently purchased (high status: Rolex watch, lower status: Seiko watch or counterfeit: replica of a Rolex watch). After reading the passage, respondents were asked to evaluate the target on a number of attributes: desirability as a date, desirability as a marriage partner, physical attractiveness, social status and trustworthiness.

As expected, MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of product status, such that targets portrayed as having recently purchased, and wearing, a counterfeit Rolex watch were rated significantly less favorably on all five dependent variables than those wearing either a Seiko or authentic Rolex watch. Consistent with our main hypothesis, a significant three-way interaction of participant race x target race x product type was observed when analyzing Caucasian and African-American respondents. In other words, when the subject’s race matched that of the target, respondents rated the target wearing the counterfeit product more favorably than when the race of the target differed from their own. Results were similar for both the Rolex and Seiko watch. Now tell the reader in words what the three-way means. The results provide support for the efficacy of Social Identity Theory in understanding status consumption, and the hypothesis that perceptions of consumers of counterfeit products depend on the respective group memberships of the consumer and the observer. This study also suggests that consumers of counterfeit products are actually not acquiring the prestige and status they are seeking. In fact, their choice of counterfeit products may actually negatively influence the image these consumers project to others.

The Tiger Roars: Tribalism in a Non-traditional Australian Sport
Catherine Sutton-Brady, University of Sydney

Extended Abstract

The decline individualism and the rise of tribalism have now been noted by many researchers, (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2001; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Tribes according to Maffesoli (1996) are held together through shared emotions, life styles, moral beliefs and consumption practices. Additionally there has been much research, building on the idea of the “subculture of consumption” as defined by Schouten and McAlexander, (1995) as “a distinct subgroup of society that self selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity”. The definition was further expanded by Kozinets (2001) to groups whose members define themselves within a broader cultural context, finding meaning and community largely in terms of holding contrasting positions against that cultural background.

The traditional idea of community has also been challenged in today’s world with increasing geographical mobility (Thompson and Holt, 1996) in a sense blurring the boundaries. What we are now seeing is the tribes or community being formed with no geographical boundaries (Tambyah, 1996). Many tribes today are based on sport and other leisure pursuits. Belk and Costa (1998) refer to these as transient consumption communities which result from serious leisure pursuits and are defined by shared experiences objects and actions.

This paper explores tribalism in the martial art of karate. Shotokan Karate a traditional Japanese martial art form has been practiced in Australia for less than 30 years, therefore is not considered a traditional Australian sport, but does have a significant following. Using ethnographic evidence gathered at the last World Championships in Durban South Africa, this paper introduces and showcases elements of tribalism and of the subculture of consumption which are evidenced by following the Australian team over three days of competition. Over the three days of competition we see evidence not only of tribalism in karate in general but clearly see it manifesting in the behavior of the national teams of various countries. These competitors and spectators share a passion for the sport. It gives them a sense of identity. The spectacle of the sport is enhanced by the opening ceremony. We see evidence of rituals, flags, chants setting the tribes apart, but conversely we see the shared meanings in rules of competition, karate gi (uniform) and an overall passion for the way of life.

The importance of karate as a way of life for the karateka was further evidenced in post competition interviews that were carried out, which reaffirm Maffesoli (1996) idea that “the accent is on that which unites, not that which separates”. So while we clearly find differences between nations in their pursuit of competitive success they still define themselves based on their sport, showing a shared commitment to the sport. Many respondents spoke of their karate family, which for most was a global family, crossing many national boundaries.

References