The Demand For Counterfeits - an Extended Tpb Approach With Empirical Evidence From Seven Countries

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This paper aims to broaden the knowledge on why consumers buy counterfeit products, a global concern to manufacturers of original products. Extended through the concept of self-identity, the Theory of Planned Behavior is used as theoretical underpinning in a seven-country study. Overall, findings support the usefulness of the extended TBP to explain the demand for fakes in a multi-country setting. A more in-depth look into individual linkages reveals national idiosyncrasies and provides interesting avenues for future research.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper aims to broaden the knowledge on why consumers buy counterfeit products, a global concern to manufacturers of original products. Extended through the concept of self-identity, the Theory of Planned Behavior is used as theoretical underpinning in a seven-country study. Overall, findings support the usefulness of the extended TBP to explain the demand for fakes in a multi-country setting. A more in-depth look into individual linkages reveals national idiosyncrasies and provides interesting avenues for future research.

Introduction

The trade with counterfeit products has been growing dramatically across the globe, and manufacturers of the original products find themselves in a constant battle against this malpractice. In order to curb the demand for counterfeits, the knowledge on what drives customers to buy the copy rather than the original is crucial. As pointed out in the literature (Eisend & Schuchert-Güler, 2006), the knowledge base in the field is still fragmented and lacks theoretical substantiation. Thus, with our contribution, we aimed at extending existing research in various ways: (1) responding to the frequent call for more theoretical underpinning by using the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) as a framework, (2) extending it with the concept of self-identity and (3) applying the model to a multi-country sample to meet frequent calls for more cross-national research in this area (Fullerton & Punj, 1997; Husted, 2000).

Conceptual Background

In consumer misbehavior research, which uses the purchase of counterfeits as one of its classic examples (Fullerton & Punj, 2004; Green & Smith, 2002), the TBP was used previously (d’Astous, Colbert, & Montpetit, 2005); yet only in the context of software and music piracy, i.e., product categories with highly functional benefits (e.g., Kwong & Lee, 2002). For the product categories that we selected for our research; counterfeits of widely used branded products (such as textiles, handbags, accessories), the TBP was not used so far as a theoretical framework.

Branded products are used to improve the self-concept through the transfer of attributed meanings and thus the enrichment of self-value. People who are buying branded products are especially concerned about the impression they make and more sensitive to interpersonal rejections (Ang, Cheng, Lim, & Tamyah, 2001; Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000). For this process to work, interaction with others is necessary. Others deliver meaning to brands as brands are interpreted differently by different consumer groups (Hogg, Cox, & Keeling, 2000).

Through the concept of subjective norm, the TBP takes the role of social influences on the purchasing behavior into account (Terry, Hogg, & White, 2000). Theoretically, the purchase of counterfeits is based on similar contentions: buying fake products means getting the prestige of branded products without paying for it (Cordell, Wongtada, & Kieschnick, 1996), thus indicating suitability of TBP also in our research context. Recently, concerns were raised that subjective norm exhaustively covers external influences on purchasing decisions (Thorbjörnsen, Pedersen, & Nysveen, 2007). Research strongly points towards self-identity as a meaningful extension of the TBP (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Mannetti, Pierro, & Livi, 2002; Thorbjörnsen et al., 2007). In that respect, self-identity has been used in purchasing settings, where ethical considerations are an important influence (Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Sparks, 2000). While buying counterfeits represents unethical consumer behavior, the underlying arguments related to self-identity may apply similarly in our research context.

Methodology

Based on existing literature and the contentions outlined above, a model was developed. Attitudes towards counterfeits/counterfeiting, the subjective norm (operationalized in three ways: as direct social influence through immediate peers, interpersonal influence susceptibility, consumer motivation), perceived behavioral control, perceived access to counterfeits and price consciousness were outlined as drivers of intention. Ethical disposition, self-identity and fashion consciousness were modeled as antecedents. The model was tested at two different price levels (counterfeit is significantly/slightly cheaper than the original).

We tested our theoretical model in seven countries, namely Mexico, Thailand, Ukraine, Slovakia, the U.S., Austria and Sweden. Country selection is based on Husted’s (2000) work who identified three factors as important drivers of the demand for counterfeits (GNP per capita, distribution of income, individualism). Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire survey. After pre-testing and checking for content validity of the measures, the final questionnaire was made available in the languages pertinent in the countries chosen. Linguistic equivalence between the different versions was established through back-translation (Brislin, 1970).

Findings and Discussion

As results show, the general model structure we proposed appears to be universal with an acceptable fit across the seven countries and the two different price levels. So, with our research goals in mind, the extended Theory of Planned Behavior on an overall level serves well as a theoretical framework to predict the demand for counterfeits across countries.

A more in-depth look into individual linkages revealed a multi-faceted picture. While attitudes do have an effect on intentions to purchase, linkages differ in strength on a country basis. This holds even truer, when it comes to the antecedents to attitudes. Influences other than attitudes turned out to be more stable across countries when predicting purchase intention. Perceived behavioral control was a particularly important influence on the intention to buy. Similarly important and consistently, price consciousness does NOT influence the intention to buy. This contradicts the conventional notion and arguments put forward in the literature. The access to counterfeits turned out to be influential in explaining intentions to buy, yet less strongly and consistently than the other two factors.

The importance of social norm as proposed in TBP holds true to a large extent. Particularly, the immediate social environment plays an important role, while on a more general level (interpersonal influence susceptibility, consumer motivation) the impact of social norm is fading. Self-identity does not impact intention directly, but very much indirectly via the subjective norm.
In terms of future research, given the national idiosyncrasies, it appears called for to investigate in more depth how attitudes are formed on a national level and in what way the antecedents proposed influence this formation. Moreover, deepening the insights into how and on what level self-identity and subjective norm are related and influence other constructs would contribute to the theoretical advancement of TPB. Finally, while the general model structure appears to be universal, the specific variable values at national levels point to cultural influences. Exploring and explaining these national/cultural idiosyncrasies will be helpful to deepen the understanding of why consumers buy fakes.

REFERENCES


An Exploratory Study of Media Multitasking Practices and Experiences among Young Consumers
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

An increasingly important line of inquiry in consumer behavior is the study of the ways consumers multitask across multiple forms of media in a simultaneous fashion (Pilotta and Schultz 2005). Simultaneous media consumption, which we call media multitasking, is a phenomenon born from the plethora of media and communications platforms available and easily accessible to consumers, especially among young consumers. The media landscape and delivery system itself has changed dramatically in recent times. Contemporary media employs multitasking formats, such as television newscasts displaying multiple messages on one screen, enabling viewers to access several different news items simultaneously. Further, consumers are no longer passive media spectators, but interact with media in co-production settings, such as seen with consumer-generated advertisements or text-message voting for a favorite singer in television shows such as American Idol.

However, marketing research continues to examine media consumption and treat marketing communication issues under a sequential, traditional marketing communication model where the consumer is a passive receiver of one type of media at one time. This study represents a first attempt to examine the phenomenon of media multitasking and its implications for marketing communication concepts and strategy.

Media multitasking, the simultaneous consumption of multiple media platforms seems to be the norm, especially among young Gen Y consumers who have grown up amidst today’s vast media landscape. According to a nation-wide survey study reported by Time magazine, Americans aged 8 to 18 not only consume the greatest amount of media, but through electronic media they can compress 8.5 hours worth of media time a day into a 6.5 hour time-period through simultaneous consumption (Wallis 2006). This study attempts to a) examine media multitasking behavior among young consumers and b) provide an understanding of their motivations, experiences, and coping with media multitasking.

The study of multitasking has primarily been the domain of cognitive psychology, concluding that multitasking threatens consumers’ task effectiveness, learning and well being. However, the cognitive perspective ignores the socialization aspect of behavior. Mick and Fournier (1998) illustrate the ways individual attempt to cope with the ubiquity of technology. Consumers may also develop specific skills with which to manage and even automate performance involving multiple tasks (Kanfer and Ackerman 1996). In some instances, consumers may be more effective while multitasking when they are able use technology to complement or supplement other media (Sinan, Brynjolfsson, and Alstyne 2007; Jenkins 2006).

For example, consumers may seek to complement and add depth to their media experience by searching for results of a sporting event online while they are simultaneously watching the event on television. Therefore, consumers may adopt multitasking strategies in order to increase comprehension and effectiveness in the consumption of online and offline media. Highly practiced skills, such as sequential or simultaneous multitasking across sources of media, may be developed as strategies to deal or cope with vast amounts of media communications sources or outlets (Sinan, Brynjolfsson, and Alstyne 2007). In what he refers to as the participatory culture, Jenkins (2006) also suggests that because of the rise in access to digital media, particularly among the youth market, multitasking and attention should not be viewed as an “either, or” proposition, given that the nature of attention to media among young consumers has changed to that of continuous partial attention. In other words, consumers born and raised during the Internet era are perhaps becoming more skilled at navigating between and effectively managing multiple sources of information and media content.

The goal of the study is to examine the experience of media multitasking from the perspective of the young Gen Y consumer. Therefore, we selected as a purposeful sample for the study 64 undergraduate students at a university in the northeastern U.S. The students were also screened on their media consumption to insure that they continuously participate in media multitasking. As this is an exploratory study, a qualitative approach was taken. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and collages developed to portray their media consumption.

We found that media multitasking is a normal activity in students’ lives driven by a) the ease of accessibility and the interactive nature of contemporary media; and b) the participatory culture in which they live. For Gen Y, work, leisure, socialization, and personal self-development are closely related with exposure to various media and communications technologies. We found that most media multitasking evolved around the offline (television) and the online (computers). Consistent with past research, our findings suggest that television is typically consumed as a background media, whereas online sources (e.g., the Internet) act as foreground media characterized by discrete burst of engagement and attention. Two types of media multitasking behaviors emerged that differ in terms of the role of the consumer as either active participant or passive victim, as well as in terms of the individual’s level of attention and engagement. The first type of media multitasking behavior involves strategic switching between various media platforms. The second type of multitasking is a passive mode of behavior, characterized by the individual constantly tuning in and out various media with the goal of simply being “always on”.

Media multitasking is considered by our informants as paradoxical. Our data suggests a subset of consumer paradoxes of technology developed by Mick and Fournier (1998): efficient/inefficient, connectivity/isolation, and freedom/enslavement. To cope with these paradoxes consumers develop various coping strategies (Mick and Fournier 1999) from restriction of media usage to the refinement of personal media consumption practices. The majority of our informants claimed that, while they were aware of personal issues and challenges associated with their media consumption, they have become effective multitaskers as a result of their active participation as consumers of contemporary media and the associated role of media as a socialization agent within the youth participatory culture. Based on these findings the paper provides implication for theory and practice.