Research on Motivations Underlying the Attitude and the Intention to Purchase Counterfeits of Luxury Brands: Based on the Functional Theory of Attitude

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ABSTRACT

The functional theory of attitude has long been of interest in marketing research. A lot of researches have proved the purchasing intention of counterfeit luxury brands are affected by the utilitarian function and the social identity function. But few researches pay attention to the situational factors which may moderate the relationship between the attitude functions and purchasing intention of counterfeit luxury brands. This research proposes that store atmosphere, the location and occasion of the shopping activity, and the relationship between the genuine product and the counterfeit can all moderate the attitude functions toward purchasing intention.

1 Introduction

Motivations underlying the attitude have been proved to play an important role in attitude functions, with attitudes toward some objects or products serving primarily a single function (e.g., Katz 1960; Schlosser 1998). This important influence can be explained by a set of models known as the functional theory of attitude (Katz 1960; Shavitt 1989), which posits that the utilitarian function and the social identity function are the most influential type of attitude functions (Katz 1960; Shavitt 1989). And decades of research on attitudes has suggested that the types of attitude functions toward one product are affected by various factors (Shavitt 1989; Ian, Teah and Lee 2009). Thus, this research sets out to examine how the different types of attitude functions affect the intention to purchase counterfeits of luxury brands. It is posited that the social identity function served by consumer’s luxury brands can be influenced by different situation factors.

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2 Factors Influence Consumers’ Attitudes Toward Counterfeits of Luxury Brands

Counterfeits, which are reproductions of a real brand, are similar to genuine products (Cordell, Nittaya and Robert 1996). Generally speaking, consumers who purchase counterfeits are divided into two types: one type of consumers is deceived about the product’s origin and these consumers are actually victims of deception; those in the other type are actually willing to purchase counterfeit products, though they know the products are illegal. It is the second type that this research focuses on.

Previous studies have examined a variety of factors that can affect consumers’ attitudes toward counterfeit purchase. Studies may center on the examination of the individual’s behavioral beliefs, feelings toward counterfeiting and product attributes (Ian and Teah 2009; e.g., Ian et al. 2009). For example, Phau (2009) examined the relationship between consumers’ attitude functions and six factors (brand consciousness, personal gratification, value consciousness, pricing and quality inference, social influence and brand prestige). The result shows that both social influence and price quality inference were found to significantly affect attitudes toward counterfeits of luxury brands (e.g., Ian et al. 2009). Similarly, Ian and Teah (2009) show that status consumption and integrity are the strong influencers. Whereas normative susceptibility, information susceptibility, personal gratification, value consciousness, and novelty seeking have weaker influencing relationships.

As the research indicates, social influence and price quality are the main factors affect consumers’ attitudes. Based on the previous research, Ian and Teah (2009) proposed that factors affecting consumers’ attitude are divided into two groups: social factors and personality factors. And drawing on this framework, this research classifies all the factors into two categories. The all factors are listed in figure 1.

Figure 1 Factors influencing attitudes toward counterfeits of luxury brands

Among these factors, integrity is found to be an extremely important factor in influencing social consequences of consumer attitudes towards counterfeits of luxury brands. Status of consumption seems to consistently affect both “perceptions of counterfeits” and “social consequences” from the measure of attitudes towards counterfeits of luxury brands (Ian and Teah 2009). In other words, “Integrity” and “status consumption” are the most significant factors influencing consumers’ attitudes. “Integrity” and “status consumption” represent “the utilitarian function”, “Status consumption” and “social influence” represent “the social identity function”. So the attitude functions can be divided into two representative types: social-adjustive and value-expressive.
3 The Utilitarian Function and the Social Identity Function

The functional theory of attitude proposed several types of attitude functions. The utilitarian function and the social identity function are the most important types (Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1990). Objects engaging the utilitarian function elicit concerns regarding the intrinsic rewards or punishments delivered by the object, whereas objects engaging the social identity function elicit concerns regarding self-other relationships and the expression of the self-concept (Shavitt, 1990).

Based on this framework, Wilcox (2009) demonstrates consumers’ desire for counterfeit luxury brands hinges on the social-adjustive function underlying their luxury brand preferences. And they found that both consumers’ preferences for a counterfeit brand and the subsequent negative changes in their preferences for the real brand are greater when their luxury brand attitudes serve a social-adjustive rather than a value-expressive function (Wilcox, Kim and Sen 2009). Han(2010) proposed a taxonomy that assigned each consumer to one of four groups according to their wealth and need for status. Poseurs are have-nots and have a higher need for status. They are significantly more likely to buy counterfeits than the other three types (Han, Young Jee, Joseph C. Nunes and Xavier Drèze 2010). They want to signal to the have-nots that they are not one of them. This conclusion is in line with the above conclusion.

On the other hand, consumers’ hinges on the value-expressive function are less likely to buy counterfeits. Patricians are in low need for status and wealth, so they want to associate with their own group and buy quiet luxury goods (e.g., Han et al. 2010). And when consumers’ attitudes serve a value-expressive function, their moral belief can affect their attitudes toward counterfeits (e.g., Wilcox et al. 2009).

These conclusions have proved that different types of attitude functions actually influence purchasing intention. So consumers with a value-expressive function can be affected by morality, and it can suppose those with a social-adjustive function can be influenced by elements of the marketing mix.

4 Factors That Can Moderate the Relationship Between Attitudes and Purchasing Intention Toward Counterfeits of Luxury Brand

The social functions served by consumers’ luxury brand attitudes can be influenced by elements of the marketing mix (e.g., product design, advertising) (e.g., Wilcox et al. 2009). For example, if advertisements implying the damage counterfeit purchase will do to consumers’ social status is broadcast on the TV, consumers with a social-adjustive function attitude may be less inclined to buy counterfeits. Similarly, an advertisement with ethical or illegal issues may make a consumer with a value-expressive function attitude less likely to purchase counterfeits (e.g., Wilcox et al. 2009).

Luxury goods with the lower-priced and louder items in a luxury handbag are more easily to be copied (e.g., Han et al. 2010). And Poseurs want to be haves. They are more likely to associate with patricians and parvenus by purchase counterfeit goods with louder items. So marketers can curb the demand for counterfeit brands through producing luxury goods with lower brand items (e.g., Wilcox et al. 2009).

![Figure 2 The moderating variables between attitudes and purchasing intention](image-url)
The functional theory of attitude has long been of interest in marketing research. A lot of researches have proved the purchasing intention of counterfeit luxury brands are affected by the utilitarian function and the social identity function. But few researches pay attention to the situational factors which may moderate the relationship between the attitude functions and purchasing intention. Functional theorists also proposed that the situation in which an attitude object is encountered could influence how the object is perceived functionally (Shavitt, 1989). Shavitt (1989) reviewed some operational developments related to consumer attitudes, focusing particular attention on tie role of products and brands in eliciting attitude functions. That paper proposed that an understanding of the motivations underlying product attitudes and purchase decisions must account for the interrelation of a variety of factors that can influence attitude functions, including products, personalities, and situations. Consumers who buy counterfeits of luxury brands may not purchase them in their hometowns, but instead they may purchase them when they are travelling, where counterfeits are offered more easily. So the moderating variables where and when consumers usually purchase counterfeits can be further investigated to illustrate how the environmental factors affect the relationship between the attitude functions and purchasing intention.

According to the functional theory of attitudes, appeals are most persuasive when they address the motives underlying the attitude targeted for change. Schlosser (1998) has proved that store atmosphere influence perceptions of social identity products but have little effect on perceptions of utilitarian products. Furthermore, store atmosphere elicits different shopping motives and purchasing intention. In addition to contributing to the understanding of how store atmosphere affects store inferences, Schlosser (1998) has extended previous research and theory on attitude functions by suggesting that situations can elicit motives as well as serve as subtle, product-nonspecific appeals, selectively affecting judgments of products that are consistent with the situational appeal’s function. Thus it can propose that store atmosphere may influence the attitude functions toward purchasing intention.

On the basis of theories on the luxury industry, Hieke (2010) developed the hypothesis that counterfeits have a damaging effect on the image of a brand built on exclusivity and specialty. An empirical study undertaken for this purpose reveals that the negative effects predicted in theory do not lead to a significant change in brand image perception. Thus Hieke (2010) reveals that the negative effects toward real luxury brands predicted in theory do not lead to a significant change in brand image perception. Consumers rationalize purchasing counterfeits as justifiable because they perceive themselves to be less unethical or illegal, and consumers may be inclined to purchase counterfeits (e.g., Ian et al. 2009). In other words, the relationship between counterfeits and real brands can moderate the consumers’ attitudes toward purchasing intention. So it can propose that the relationship between luxury counterfeits and real brands can also moderate the relationship between attitudes and purchasing intention of counterfeits.

References