"Measuring materialism in counterfeit luxury brands consumption"

Viet Dung Trinh (Curtin University, Australia)
Ian Phau (Curtin University, Australia)

Counterfeiting of luxury brands is a growing problem worldwide for authentic brands and policy makers. Regardless of the results of international trade talks, the combined efforts of individual organizations and law enforcement agencies, the issue of counterfeit consumption seems to remain a permanent feature of the marketplace. In recent years, counterfeit purchasing continues to grow worldwide, and it is it is sometimes regarded as a common act of consumption.

There are many explanations for consumers to intrigue themselves in purchasing counterfeit luxury brands. The explanations are varied from price to accessibility, from hedonic value to symbolic value and so on. From the listed possible explanations, the tie between what make consumers buy counterfeit luxury brands and materialism has become so clear. Materialism is "the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods in achieving major life goals or desired states". Materialistic consumers tend to consume more than other consumers, with clear intention to consume products that generate social recognition or status for the owner. They often display acquired goods to feel distinctive from others. Luxury brands offer flamboyant display of wealth and status. Therefore highly materialistic consumers without the financial capacity to achieve their ambitions are likely to turn to counterfeit luxury brands.

Materialism is also a term that usually associates with luxury brands consumption. But despite the prolonged relationship of materialism in luxury brands consumption and its more recent tie with counterfeit consumption, there are only a handful of studies that included materialism as a predictor of consumer attitudes toward counterfeit luxury brands and their willingness to buy such products. Nevertheless, the findings of these studies have denied the role of materialism in influencing attitudes or willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury brands. This raises a critical question, whether materialism really does not have any influence in counterfeit luxury brands consumption or has it been measured wrongly?

This paper proposes a new measure, through scale development to capture the dimensions of materialism in the context of counterfeit luxury brands. This research fulfils a significant gap in the current knowledge as current scales do not distinguish between the specific counterfeit consumption types based on product specificity and the underlying consumer value system in this case materialism. Specifically, this paper proposes a unique solution to clarify the problem by developing a new scale to measure three original material values – success, centrality and happiness – plus another three sub-dimensions that target counterfeit luxury brands consumption – conspicuousness, status and distinctiveness.

Introduction

Counterfeiting of luxury brands is a growing problem worldwide for authentic brands and policy makers. In recent years, counterfeit purchasing continues to grow worldwide, aggravating the current situation coupled with the emergence of new variants of counterfeiting activities (Eisend and Schuchert-Guler, 2006). There are many potential explanations for consumers to intrigue themselves in purchasing counterfeit luxury brands. From the literature, the link between what make consumers buy counterfeit luxury brands and materialism has surfaced to be a critical driver to what some defined as unethical and immoral consumption behaviour (Eastman et al., 1999; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Wee et al., 1995). Materialism is "the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods in achieving major life goals or desired states" (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Materialistic consumers tend to consume more than other consumers, with clear intention to consume products that generate social recognition or status for the owner (Mason, 2001). They often display acquired goods to be distinct from others (Eastman et al., 1999). Luxury brands offer flamboyant display of wealth and status (Mason, 1998). Therefore highly materialistic consumers without the financial capacity to achieve their ambitions are likely to turn to counterfeit luxury brands.

Background Literature

Counterfeiting of luxury brands is a growing problem worldwide for authentic brands and policy makers. In recent years, counterfeit purchasing continues to grow worldwide, aggravating the current situation coupled with the emergence of new variants of counterfeiting activities (Eisend and Schuchert-Guler, 2006). There are many potential explanations for consumers to intrigue themselves in purchasing counterfeit luxury brands.

From the literature, the link between what make consumers buy counterfeit luxury brands and materialism has surfaced to be a critical driver to what some defined as unethical and immoral consumption behavior (Eastman et al., 1999; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Wee et al., 1995). Materialism is "the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods in achieving major life goals or desired states" (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Materialistic consumers tend to consume more than other consumers, with clear intention to consume products that generate social recognition or status for the owner (Mason, 2001). They often display acquired goods to be distinct from others (Eastman et al., 1999). Luxury brands offer flamboyant display of wealth and status (Mason, 1998). Therefore highly materialistic consumers without the financial capacity to achieve their ambitions are likely to turn to counterfeit luxury brands.

Nevertheless, there is a deficiency in the literature on the role of materialism in influencing attitudes or willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury brands or at best, the findings have been inconclusive. Belk (1985) assumes that materialism consists of three traits: possessiveness, nongenerosity and envy while Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness and possession-defined success. Those who score high on the happiness scale believe that possessions and acquisitions are essential to their satisfaction and well-being in life. The success scale describes the extent people tend to judge themselves and others by the number and quality of possessions accumulated. The centrality scale describes how much possessions and acquisitions are placed in the center of one's life (Richins and Dawson, 1992).

Although both scales are highly regarded by researchers, when employed in previous studies neither of them has proven materialism to be a substantial predictor of willingness to buy counterfeit luxury brands (Furnham and Valgeirsson, 2007; Phau et al., 2009). There are two possible explanations for the inconclusiveness of the findings:
- The existing measures of materialism do not capture the dimensions of materialism comprehensively
- The existing measures of materialism have been developed with the assumption that all possessions were authentic.

Methodology - Scale Development Approach
The scale development encompasses a number of studies, books and articles although Churchill (1979), DeVellis (1991, 2003), Li, Edwards and Lee (2002) and Nunnally (1978). Through an intended four studies, the research generates and purifies the items through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), shows content validity and unidimensionality using CFA, confirms the scale's nomological, convergent, discriminant, and predictive (criterion) validity, examines the generalizability and concurrent (criterion) validity, and ensures the scale's ability to measure the intended reaction. The following is a brief discussing these studies:

Study one
The purpose is to generate items designed to 'capture the conceptual and logical true variance presented in the construct' (Eastman et al., 1999) and is the first step for the scale development. This process was therefore carefully completed, first by exploring the theory surrounding the concepts being explored to aid clarity, as per the suggestion of DeVellis (2003). Whether or not the construct being measured is distinctly different from other constructs is an important question that DeVellis (2003) suggest that researchers ask. MacKenzie (2003) suggests that good construct definition should specify the construct's conceptual theme in unambiguous terms so the construct is clearly distinguished from other constructs. Previous findings suggest that materialistic consumers bought authentic luxury brands to distinct themselves from others while many of those who seek counterfeit luxury brands were looking for an economical alternative to become less distinctive. And thus, distinctiveness is the third sub-dimension for the new scale.

Using the preceding explanations of materialism, the study (similar to Li et al., 2002) uses three methods to generate a set of potential scale items: literature reviews (Churchill 1979), thesaurus searches (Wells et al.,1971), and experience surveys (Chen and Wells, 1999; Churchill, 1979), and follows the steps for scale development set out by DeVellis (2003). Items were generated from previously developed materialism scales and the materialism literatures. 73 items were generated and put into three main dimensions: material success, material centrality and material happiness. These items are also reflected three sub-dimensions:

conspicuousness, status, and distinctiveness. Before administered to the larger sample, these items have been sent to a panel of experts for screening and review.

The items are scored on a 5 point Likert format from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Item scores are summed within dimension to form indices for each dimension, and can be summed overall to form an overall materialism score. EFA is a common first step in scale development and item refinement (DeVellis, 1991; Sweeney et al., 2000) and this procedure was undertaken.

Study two
The purpose of this study is to perform a test of unidimensionality on the scale items developed in Study One using CFA and further purify the scale (if needed) by removing unnecessary or weak items. Li et al. (2002) discuss the unidimensionality of scales as essential, as composite scores are usually calculated on the basis of the respondents' scores on all items of a scale as an unweighted sum (Hattie, 1985). By comparing the remaining items with the working definition of the construct content validity could also be undertaken. A separate sample of respondents will be recruited for this study.

Study three
This study is to establishing trait/construct validity (e.g. Peter 1981). More specifically, convergent, discriminant, and criterion (predictive) validity were examined. Nomological validity could also be suggested. Churchill (1979), Campbell and Fiske (1959), and Oh (2005) are the key studies followed for this procedure. Similar to the undertaking by Oh (2005), two existing scales will be included in this study to establish predicative validity.

Study four
The purpose is to increase in the generalizability of the scale. A CFA on the validated items on a different brand name of a luxury brand and the use of an authentic and fictitious brand name will serve the purpose. Successful adoption of the scale in both academic and managerial scenarios would require the scale to remain functional under varying conditions. CFA is also ideal for the final verification of the unidimensionality of a scale (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988; Li et al., 2002). A concurrent validity test is also performed that will describe the operationalization's ability to distinguish between groups and that it should theoretically be able to distinguish between (Trochim, 2006).

Contributions, Implications and Concluding Comments
This study contributes to the body of literature by enhancing theoretical understanding of the relationship between materialism and its influence on consumer willingness to buy counterfeit luxury brands. In light of methodological contribution, this study is the most contemporary attempt to develop a new scale to measure materialism in a specific context. With the new measure, it is possible to understand partly what lies behind willingness to buy counterfeit luxury brands. That would be the most important managerial implication this study can provide for marketers, managers of luxury brands.

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