

An introduction to the special issue on the past, present and future research on deliberate lookalikes

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this editorial is to present the contemporary thinking on deliberate lookalikes and to provide better understanding of its key forms (counterfeits, copycats, and no-name imitations) and markets (deceptive and non-deceptive).

Design/methodology/approach – This editorial contains a review of current and past literature on deliberate lookalikes along with summaries of all the articles accepted for publication in the special issue on deliberate lookalikes. The guest editors used academic databases such as Web of Science to find the most representative scholarly work on deliberate lookalikes literature.

Findings – This editorial identifies pertinent research gaps in the literature on deliberate lookalikes. The five selected articles address some of these research gaps and provide useful insights on the purchase and usage of deliberate lookalikes along with directions for future research and ways to apply different research methods that could have important implications for scholars and managers.

Originality – The editorial and special issue extend our knowledge about the deliberate lookalikes and their effects on firms, brands and consumers. This work opens new avenues for the research about different forms and markets in the context of lookalikes.

Keywords – Counterfeits, Copycats, Deliberate lookalikes

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

One of the “prices” that successful brands have to pay is that they are imitated, often via lookalikes. Lookalikes have strong similarities with authentic branded offers and might take various forms, including counterfeits, copycats and no-name imitations. Firms are facing various marketing and legal problems, including loss of sales and profits, consumer dissatisfaction, legal liability and safety issues, etc. (Evans et al., 2019). In addition, these fraudulent activities may negatively affect the performance outcomes of brands (Davicik et al., 2015) and brand equity (Wilson et al., 2016).

Counterfeits and pirated goods are growing at an alarming rate, accounting for up to 10 percent of world trade (about USD 650 billion per annum) (Chen et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2015). A recent report by the World Customs Organization shows that counterfeit and pirated goods worth USD 1.47 billion were caught by customs authorities in 58 member countries in 2012 (WCO, 2013). Not surprisingly, as the world’s largest consumer market, the United States leads the list with 7615 (34%) cases, followed by Saudi Arabia, Italy and Spain, with top 15 countries contributing to 92% of all reported cases. China and Hong Kong are the major contributors with two-thirds (67%) of total reported cases. In volume terms, personal accessories (3531 cases, 16%), clothing (3303 cases, 15%), pharmaceuticals (2287 cases, 10 %) and mobile phones (2125 cases, 9%) account for half of the reported cases; whereas, in value terms, accessories (29%) and watches (26%) alone account for more than 50% of the total, followed by electronic appliances (12%), clothing (8%) and footwear (5%). Major brands, and in particular Rolex, Sony, Louis Vuitton, Rayban, Gucci, Hermes, Burberry, D&G, Adidas and Armani contribute about half of the total value (about USD 700 million) for the reported cases.

In view of these findings, it is not surprising to see growing attention from academics, marketers, regulators, and consumers on lookalikes and their impact in the marketplace (Geiger-Oneto et al., 2013; Hamelin, Nwankwo and El Hadouchi, 2013; Yoo and Lee, 2012; Zimmerman, 2013).

Literature review

Counterfeits are products that imitate an established brand in terms of all its characteristics, including its trademark (Baghi et al., 2016). The traditional view in branding literature typically views counterfeiting as unauthorized manufacturing goods that are protected with patents, trademarks, copyrights, and similar (Cordell et al., 1996). The contemporary view understands brands as holders of the identity and meanings that are co-created in a stakeholder network (Brodie et al., 2017), and manufacturing firms are only the owners of the trademark (Evans et al., 2019). **Copycats** are products that have a different brand name but look very similar to an existing brand and therefore they confuse consumers (Coelho do Vale and Verga Matos, 2015; Le Roux et al., 2016). The research on copycats is still limited (Satomura et al., 2014), with few studies on the effects of copycatting practice on brand perception (Cova & Cova, 2019), consumer behavior (Le Roux et al., 2016), private labels (Coelho do Vale and Verga Matos, 2015; Aribarg et al., 2014), etc. **No-name imitations** are products that look similar to an existing brand but do not carry a brand name (Ohly, 2010; Wu and Li, 2011); however, there is very little research into these types of lookalikes as well.

In addition, there are two types of lookalikes in the marketplace – deceptive and non-deceptive (Hübner, 2007). In the **deceptive** (primary) market, consists primarily from counterfeit products and unscrupulous manufacturers or retailers cheat the customers by selling counterfeits of well-known brands without the customers' knowledge (Falkowski, Olszewska and Ulatowska, 2014; Grossman and Shapiro, 1988). In **non-deceptive** (secondary) market, consumers knowingly and deliberately buy lookalike products, such as personal accessories, pirated music CDs, movie DVDs or software (Penz, Schlegelmilch and Stöttinger, 2009; Penz and Stöttinger, 2008). Knowing that a product is a counterfeit can also influence the behaviour of potential buyers (Baghi et al., 2016; Le Roux et al., 2019). Although these different categories exist, the market data does not always differentiate between the different categories of lookalikes and classifies them all as counterfeits and pirated goods. Table 1 shows examples of past studies that explore the different types of lookalikes.

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Research gaps

Despite the growing research in lookalikes and consumer behaviour and the use of various theoretical perspectives (e.g., economic, ethical, and socio-normative) to explore the phenomenon (Eisend and Schuchert-Güler, 2006; Staake, Thiesse and Fleisch, 2009; Zhan, Sharma and Chan, 2015), there are still many mixed findings and unanswered questions in the area (Geiger-Oneto et al., 2013; Hamelin et al., 2013). For example, many studies find a positive influence of attitude towards counterfeiting on deliberate counterfeit purchase intentions (e.g., Maldonado and Hume, 2005; Wee, Tan and Cheok, 1995) as well as past purchase behaviour (e.g., Penz and Stöttinger, 2005) but others find no effects on purchase intentions (e.g., Hoe, Hogg and Hart., 2003) or past purchase behaviour (e.g., de Matos, Ituassu and Rossi, 2007; Walthers and Buff, 2008). Similarly, most studies find a negative effect of subjective norms against counterfeiting and perceived social risk on counterfeit purchase behaviour but some do not (e.g., Shaari and Halim, 2006; Veloutsou and Bian, 2008). Finally, some find a negative effect of ethical and moral beliefs on counterfeit purchase behaviour unlike others (Wang et al., 2005).

This special issue focuses on the deliberate purchase of lookalikes in order to demystify the complex consumer decision-making process influenced by a combination of diverse economic, ethical, and socio-psychological motivations (Li and Seaton, 2015; Liu et al., 2015; Randhawa, Calantone and Voorhees, 2015). An extensive review of the current literature on deliberate lookalike purchase behaviour reveals the following research gaps, which may partly explain the above mixed findings:

1. Most studies only explore the "independent" influence of consumer attitudes, ethical judgments, moral beliefs and subjective norms on counterfeit usage (e.g., de Matos et al., 2007; Penz et al., 2009). Hence, it is not clear how these factors may affect each other or have a combined influence on counterfeit purchase behaviour.
2. Most studies also examine the "direct" influence of consumer attitudes, ethical judgments, moral beliefs and subjective norms on counterfeit purchase, but overlook the mediating role of

‘product evaluation’, a key element of consumer decision-making (e.g., Ang et al., 2001; Chapa, Minor and Maldonado, 2006; de Matos et al., 2007; Kwong et al., 2003; Maldonado and Hume, 2005; Wang et al., 2005).

3. Conceptual delineation between the product and brand lookalikes is unclear and usually non-existing in the literature, For instance, Evans et al. (2019) use a Google Scholar search to show that academic research into lookalikes has grown in the last few years, but manuscripts on counterfeit products are much more common than those on counterfeit brands.
4. Past research on counterfeits mostly focuses on the impact of consumer perceptions and attitudes about the purchase and usage of counterfeit products and there are very few studies that examine their impact on the genuine brands (Sharma and Chan, 2011). Hence, it would be useful to study how the consumer perceptions about genuine brands change as a result of the proliferation of counterfeit products around them.
5. Many studies cover a single product category such as auto parts (Chakraborty, Allred and Bristol, 1996), sunglasses (Veloutsou and Bian, 2008), pirated music CDs (Ang et al., 2001), VCDs (Shaari and Halim, 2006), and software (Chang, 1998; Moores and Chang, 2006; Tan, 2002); whereas others chose multiple product categories without a strong conceptual basis, thus limiting the generalizability of their findings. Hence, there is a need for a more nuanced and theory-based examination of lookalikes in different product categories.
6. The vast majority of the existing research, with very few exemptions (e.g., Le Roux et al., 2016), either focus only on counterfeits, or do not differentiate between the different categories of lookalikes and treats them as one single category.
7. There is very little research focusing on copycats and even less research focusing on no-name imitations and the role of these kinds of lookalikes on the attitudes and the behaviour of consumers towards the lookalikes and towards the genuine brand.
8. Finally, most studies focus on the attitudes and behaviours of current users of counterfeit products and ignore the non-users, hence there is little knowledge about the differences in the motivations and decision-making process for these two diverse groups of consumers.

Special issue

The goal of this special issue was to address the above research gaps and to extend our knowledge about the deliberate lookalikes and their effects on firms, brands and consumers. We received 17 submissions from around the world (Australia, Bangladesh, Taiwan, China, India, France, UK, Brazil, and Turkey) and all these papers were subjected to the standard double-blind peer-review process, which included reviews by two or three reviewers. At the culmination of the review process, we accepted five manuscripts for final publication (acceptance rate 29%). These five manuscripts use diverse methodological approaches and measurement methods. Specifically, this special issue contains a conceptual article (Evans, Starr, and Brodie, 2019), two articles using qualitative methodologies, including an ethnographic study (Cova and Cova, 2019) and semi-structured interviews (Cekirdekci and Latif, 2019), and two articles using experimental studies (Pathak, Velasco, and Calvert, 2019; Le Roux, Thebault, and Roy, 2019),

The paper by Evans, Starr, and Brodie (2019) aims to apply a broader perspective of branding to offer new insights and strategies to address the problem of product counterfeiting. The authors use a comprehensive review of the counterfeiting and branding literature to develop a new conceptual framework that combines proactive and collaborative processes with traditional product branding approaches. This integrative framework provides a basis to develop innovative, proactive strategies that complement traditional branding approaches to address product counterfeiting. Specifically, the authors introduce opportunities for the firms to collaborate with multiple stakeholders to develop strategies that can help control counterfeiting by developing deep and inimitable relationships between managers and other stakeholders in a marketing network. The authors also propose a research agenda to guide future research on strategies to curb the menace of counterfeiting by leveraging collaboration between managers and brand stakeholders to complement conventional approaches. Overall, this paper contributes to the growing body of counterfeiting and brand protection literature by adapting and applying contemporary integrative branding concepts to offer novel strategies to address the issue.

Cova and Cova (2019) explore the phenomenon of experience copycats using an ethnographic study of the Québec copycat of the Way to Compostela pilgrimage route. The authors use the methods of participant observation, photo analysis, non-directive and semi-directive interviews, and introspection to observe and analyze the copycat experiences of a group of eighteen pilgrims who spent twelve days on the Québec Compostela pilgrimage route, in terms of differences between the two Compostela routes in themes (religion, kind of walk), features (name, distance, settings, culture, markings, organization, etc.), and experiences (socialization, accommodations, pilgrim passport, songs, certificates, and final ritual). The authors find that participants in copycat experiences may not ascribe meanings to them based solely on their own personal feelings and their appraisals are likely to be intersubjective, with each individual judgment being influenced by other participants' opinions.

The above findings may explain why consumers may evaluate their copycat experiences positively even when their appraisals might highlight negative differences in terms of features and other attributes with the original experience. These insights suggest that the fight against copycats may not be very useful when the consumers attribute copycats with meanings that complement the way in which they view original brands. Hence, it may be useful for the original brands to not aggressively challenge the copycats but cohabit with them while maintaining their own unique identities. The study demonstrates that the battle against experience copycats can be quite difficult if the participants appreciate and defend the imitation due to the development of a sense of community with them. This paper looks beyond the traditional economic and socio-psychological perspectives by using the ethnographic method to examine the deliberate lookalike uses and copycat experiences.

The article by Cekirdekci and Latif (2019) investigate how consumers' socio-economic status (SES) of consumers affects their purchase behavior of counterfeits and genuine brands using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 42 users and non-users of counterfeits from different SES groups. The authors also propose a consumer typology based on the differences in the consumer decision-making processes in terms of their neutralization processes and emotional outcomes related to the purchase behaviors across the different SES groups. These categories are described as the black chameleons, the

counterfeit owners, the genuine brand owners and the authenticity seekers. This paper extends the lookalikes literature by exploring the consumption practices of different SES groups of users and non-users of counterfeits based on the differences in their motivations, emotional outcomes and neutralization processes, which may also explain the mixed findings in the extant literature.

Pathak, Velasco, and Calvert (2019) analyze the different forms (transpositions) of deceptive (fraudulent) imitations of original brand logotypes, which can aid in the detection of a counterfeit brand. The study uses two experimental studies (with 59 and 60 participants) to explore the extent to which the consumers can explicitly and implicitly differentiate between original brand logos and their counterfeit versions at different levels of visual dissimilarity between them. The findings show that consumers can explicitly discriminate fake logos with a high degree of accuracy but this ability is diminished under the conditions in which the logos are presented very briefly (thus tapping the participants' implicit or automatic logo recognition capabilities), except when the first and last letters of the logotype are substituted. As many purchase decisions are made automatically and without much cognitive deliberation, this research provides useful insights to the brand managers and academic researchers about those key implicit characteristics that can help consumers differentiate between a genuine logo and its fake lookalike versions.

Finally, Le Roux, Thebault, and Roy (2019) study the effects of product category and consumers' motivations profiles on the factors that drive consumer preferences and purchase intentions towards counterfeits and genuine products for different types of product attributes and purchase situations. The authors use an experimental study with a sample of 170 respondents and employ a tradeoff model to manipulate three attributes, product type (genuine vs. counterfeit), price (high vs. low) and place of purchase (regular shop, Internet and market) for two product categories, in order to gauge their impact on consumers' motivations to purchase counterfeits. They use a conjoint analysis to model consumer preferences and a generalized linear mixed model to analyze their purchase intentions, to find a dominant pattern of consumer behavior towards counterfeiting that varies with the product type, price and place of purchase. Specifically, product category has a moderating effect on choice criteria,

wherein the relative importance of place of purchase and price varies across product categories. Consumers' motivations profiles also show moderating effects on consumer behavior with some profiles being more receptive to copies than others that may also depend upon product category. These findings extend the current literature on the role of price as a choice criterion by showing that price may not be the only driver of a counterfeit purchase and the interaction among price, place of purchase and product type, along with Consumers' motivations profile may actually explains this behavior.

Conclusions

The growing interest in the proliferation of deliberate lookalikes and their effects on consumers, brands and firms highlights the challenges faced by brand managers in a globalized world. The literature recognizes various deliberate lookalike forms (counterfeit, copycats, and no-name imitations) and markets (deceptive [primary] and non-deceptive [secondary]). This special issue contains five research manuscripts using different research methods and an extended editorial on contemporary issues in deliberate lookalikes research stream. All these five articles provide important insights into the vast and unexplored research area of deliberate lookalikes in the literature along with new directions for research and ways to apply different research methods that may have important implications for scholars and managers. We hope that the readers will find these articles interesting and thought-provoking for reading and extending the scholarly work in this research area.

We are grateful to our global reviewers panel for the immense help and support in developing this special issue (in alphabetic order): Anahit Armenakyan (Nipissing University), Şahver Omeraki Cekirdekci (Dogus Universitesi), Rita Coelho do Vale (Catholic University of Portugal), Bernard Cova (Kedge Business School), Cid Gonçalves Filho (Universidade Fumec), Nicholas Grigoriou (Monash University), Bianca Grohmann (Concordia University), Kalyanaram Gurusurthy (International University of Japan), Pramod Iyer (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley), Colin Jevons (Monash University), Ling Jiang (Universite du Quebec a Montreal), Daniela Langaro (ISCTE-IUL), Rasha Mostafa (Ain Shams University), Abhishek Pathak (University of Dundee), Vikas Singla (Punjabi

University), Lucas Souza (Universidade Estadual do Ceara), Anna Torres (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), Uchila Umesh (Washington State University),

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TABLE 1

Forms	Markets	Deceptive (primary market)	Non-deceptive (secondary market)	Primary & secondary market
Counterfeits		Falkowski et al. (2014; Ex), Pathak et al. (2019; Ex), Geiger-Oneto et al. (2013; E),	Cekirdekci and Latif (2019; E), Le Roux et al. (2016; Ex), Nia & Zaichkowsky (2000; E),	Le Roux et al. (2019; Ex), Evans et al. (2019, C),
Copycats		Coelho do Vale and Verga Matos (2015; Ex)	Cova & Cova (2019; Q), Bian & Moutinho (2011; Q),	Le Roux et al., (2016; Ex),
No-name imitations			Ohly (2010; C), Wu and Li (2011; C)	

Note: **C** – conceptual study; **Q** – qualitative method; **E** – empirical, survey method; **Ex** – experimental study