

College Students' Purchase Intention for Counterfeit Sport Shoes

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the intention of college students to purchase counterfeit sports shoes, with needs, information search, price, brand awareness, and the price performance ratio as the analysis factors. This study adopted a random sampling method to survey 726 college students in China. The results of the partial least squares (PLS) analysis showed that the college students, regardless of whether they had experience in purchasing counterfeit sport shoes, searched for product information when having the functional needs and symbolic needs for sport shoes. This study shows that after students have conducted a product search, the price, brand awareness, and price-performance ratio affected their purchase intentions. The findings of this study could provide a reference for practical actions to resist counterfeit sport shoes.

Keywords: Counterfeits; Sport shoes; Price; Consumer behavior; Purchase intention.

1. Introduction

Some Chinese argue that counterfeiting is a fraudulent act that seriously damages social justice and affects product quality. It has adverse effects on research and development, intellectual property, social integrity, industrial development, and tax systems (Priporas *et al.*, 2020). However, the problem of counterfeit goods still exists. Among the numerous counterfeit products, sports shoes are the most attractive for college students. Sport shoes from internationally renowned brands are expensive, and students have limited financial resources. Therefore, they turn to counterfeit sport shoes (called *shanzhai* imitation). *Shanzhai* imitation represents a type of imitation that mimics the original brand through surface or functional similarities but often provides enhanced or innovative features adapted to local market needs (Qin *et al.*, 2018) while a counterfeit is an exact copy of a genuine brand that is illegally made and infringes on a legally registered trademark (Lai and Zaichkowsky, 1999). The main problem with counterfeits is that they not only look similar to the original and have the same logo, but also look the same as the original and have the same perceived quality (Matos *et al.*, 2007). For young people, especially students, designer sport shoes are like luxury goods. Due to the high price, most of them cannot afford to purchase them. Therefore, they turn to counterfeit sport shoes (Orth *et al.*, 2019). In addition, due to the convenience of online purchasing platforms, some unscrupulous merchants have also allowed consumers with needs to easily purchase counterfeits amid the development of e-commerce (Chin *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, this study investigated the purchasing needs of college students, how they get product information when they have purchase intentions? how they evaluate alternatives? and how the alternatives affect their purchase intentions? The results of this study can provide a reference for the government and practitioners in resisting the negative impact of counterfeit sport shoes on the market.

2. Theoretical Basis, Relevant Literature, and Research Hypotheses

Many important theoretical models have been proposed in the field of consumer behavior research. One commonly cited consumer decision process is the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) model proposed by Engel *et al.* (1984). The EKB model includes the following five stages: (1) problem recognition, (2) information search, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) choice, and (5) outcome. Khan *et al.* (2021), conducted a systematic review of studies on counterfeit luxury consumption. They integrated the three main stages and factors influencing consumers' counterfeit purchases, including the decision to purchase counterfeits (behavioral, social, psychological, demographic, and marketing factors), the acquisition of counterfeits (purchase decision, attitude, and purchase intention), and the outcome of purchasing counterfeits. Past studies have demonstrated the predictive power of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) theory of reasoned action (TRA) in the purchase intention of counterfeits (Ting *et al.*, 2016). Malik *et al.* (2020), mentioned that TRA is an appropriate choice to explain counterfeit consumption, as it provides a sound and useful theoretical framework for considering attitudes and social influences, which is helpful for explaining the psychological processes behind behavioral intentions.

2.1. Problem Recognition

According to the EKB model proposed by Engel *et al.* (1984), and Kotler (2000), the purchase decision process starts with problem confirmation, which means that the starting point of all purchase decisions is the consumer's needs. When consumers have a demand, they will conduct a search for product information. Many scholars have proposed determining factors for the purchase intention of counterfeit goods, including product characteristics (i.e. price, product type) (Jiang and Cova, 2012), brand characteristics (Marticotte and Arcand, 2017), and personal values (Bian *et al.*, 2021). In terms of purchasing motivation, Eisend *et al.* (2017) used a meta-analytic analysis to analyze the psychological factors of purchasing luxury counterfeit goods, including fashion seeking, innovation, integrity, materials, risk aversion, self-concept, status seeking, smart shopping, and affordability. Djuhardi and Kusumawati (2017), found that brand image has a significant impact on attitudes towards counterfeit products. Qin *et al.* (2018) conducted a study on the purchasing drive of consumers in Shanzhai imitation, and found that social value, personal value, functional value, and financial value are the main motivational factors for consumers to purchase counterfeit goods. Chand and Fei (2020), conducted a survey of 9 shopping malls in three cities in China, including Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, to investigate the potential behavior of consumers in purchasing counterfeit goods. The results showed that conspicuous consumption and emotional attachment are mediators between self-brand association and willingness to purchase counterfeit luxury brands. Consumers eager to establish a self-concept may decide to purchase counterfeit luxury brands. The three main requirements for consumer brand image proposed by Park *et al.* (1986), namely "functionality," "symbolism," and "empiricism," are often regarded by researchers as the three main variables for students to purchase sports shoes (Chang *et al.*, 2022). Based on the above three brand images and the demand for counterfeit sports shoes generated by consumers, researchers will start searching for product information about counterfeit sports shoes. Therefore, the following three hypotheses were proposed?.

H1: Functional needs have an effect on information search for counterfeit sport shoes.

H2: Symbolic needs have an effect on information search for counterfeit sport shoes.

H3: Experiential needs have an effect on information search for counterfeit sport shoes.

2.2. Information Search

In terms of information search, according to the Consumer Socialization Theory (CST), parents, peers, and mass media play an important role in the process of consumer socialization (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). They ask for feedback from family and friends, social media platforms, and consumers who have purchased counterfeit sports shoes. With the popularization of the internet, it has become increasingly important for consumers to use electronic word-of-mouth eWOM as a source of reference for consumption when making consumption decisions (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). EWOM refers to interpersonal communication online or through social media, as well as positive or negative statements about a product or company (Yang, 2017). EWOM is not only seen as an important factor in participating in online communities, but also affects consumer purchasing intentions (Erkan and Evans, 2018). In addition, when communicating online on social media sites, peer opinions are seen as helpful in obtaining information and evaluating products (Grange and Benbasat, 2018). Attitudes towards products are formed through peer communication, which can also affect purchasing intention (Wang *et al.*, 2012). Tung (2019) studied the attitude of Taiwanese consumers towards Chinese brands and found that after the attitude change, due to the high cost-effectiveness of Chinese products, Chinese shopping websites often have comment functions. Many respondents expressed that they would first read reviews online or take advice from friends to purchase Chinese products before purchasing Chinese brands. Chen and Wang (2021) studied consumers' purchasing attitudes towards counterfeit goods in Shanghai and found that price has a positive impact. Le Roux *et al.* (2019) found the main behavioral patterns of consumers in counterfeit goods, and found that when consumers purchase counterfeit goods, price is not the only factor, and the purchase location or product type interacts with price. (Bian and Haque, 2020) found that emotional brand involvement has a positive relationship with the purchase of counterfeit goods. According to Le Roux *et al.* (2019), the study investigated consumers' behavioral intention to purchase counterfeit goods again. Using the theory of planned behavior, it was found that brand image has a mediating effect, while price remains an important incentive factor for counterfeit buyers (Francis *et al.*, 2015). Lu (2019) studied the motivation and attitude of Taiwanese consumers to purchase sports brands from mainland China, and found that price, uniqueness needs, brand spokespersons, and consumers' taste mentality all affect consumers' willingness to purchase Chinese sports brands before making purchase decisions. Based on the above analysis, this study proposed the following three hypotheses:

H4: The product price is an important consideration in the evaluation of purchasing behavior.

H5: The brand awareness is an important consideration in the evaluation of purchasing behavior.

H6: The price-performance ratio is an important consideration in the evaluation of purchasing behavior.

2.3. The Effect of Price, Brand Awareness, and Price-Performance Ratios on Purchase Intention

From the previous analysis, it was found that the price, brand awareness, and cost-effectiveness of counterfeit sports shoes (which are more cost-effective than genuine ones) are important factors for college students to evaluate their purchasing behavior, and may also affect their intention to purchase. The so-called purchase intention refers to the tendency of consumers to purchase specific products or services in the future (Michaelidou and Christodoulides, 2011). Existing research emphasizes that price, especially the monetary advantage of counterfeit and inferior

products relative to the original product, is an important predictive factor for the purchase of counterfeit products (Eisend, 2016). For some consumers, the price difference between original and counterfeit products may even represent factors that determine the purchase (Yoo and Lee, 2012). This behavior is believed to be due to buyers of counterfeit and inferior products believing that they have obtained comparable quality at a cheaper price (Tom *et al.*, 1998), and that the original product's price is unfair (Poddar *et al.*, 2012). The empirical study by Orth *et al.* (2019) also found that the price advantage of counterfeit products can affect consumers' purchasing intention. For example, Kassim *et al.* (2021) found that quality, price, visibility, and status symbols are the main motivations for customers in these two countries (Malaysia and Saudi Arabia) to choose counterfeit luxury goods. The reason luxury goods are expensive is because they are recognized and respected by everyone, so most consumers purchase them to convey symbolic meaning (Ian *et al.*, 2009). Interestingly, individuals who purchase counterfeit products do not believe that the quality of counterfeit products is inferior to genuine ones (Chaudhry and Stumpf, 2011). Research has shown that brand awareness and channels can both affect consumers' willingness to purchase Chinese sports brands when making purchasing decisions (Lu, 2019). Zhou *et al.* (2020) found that the use of personal endorsement of sports shoe brands by sports stars (attractiveness, professional knowledge, and consistency) is positively correlated with global brand assets and brand preferences, indicating that consumers will choose to purchase sports shoes endorsed by celebrities. Lu (2019), found that peer influence, herd behavior, and price performance ratio caused by social groups can affect consumers' willingness to repurchase Chinese sports brands. Based on the above analysis, this study proposed the following three hypotheses:

H7: The price of counterfeit sport shoes has a positive effect on purchase intention.

H8: The brand awareness of counterfeit sport shoes has an effect on purchase intention.

H9: The price-performance ratio of counterfeit sport shoes has an effect on purchase intention.

3. Research Method

3.1. Subjects and Sampling

The subjects of this study were students at College in China. The students of this college come from several provinces and municipalities in China. In this study, 8 College were selected by random sampling, and 100 students were randomly selected for the survey from one class in each college. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed and 726 were recovered, with an effective rate of 90.75%.

In this study, a total of 726 valid questionnaires were recovered. The subjects were mainly from 11 colleges of China, including 491 males (51.1%) and 469 females (48.9%). Regarding the year of study, 304 were in their freshman year (31.7%), 364 were in their sophomore year (37.9%), 259 were in their junior year (27%), and 33 were in their senior year (3.4%).

3.2. Measure

The questionnaire was divided into six parts. The first part was price scale and included five questions. The main purpose was to understand college students' feelings about the price of counterfeit sport shoes, including the price being lower than the price of the authentic product, and being in line with their financial ability, expectations, affordability, and reasonableness. The second part was the scale for the brand image needs of counterfeit sport shoes and included three factors and nine questions. The main purpose was to understand college students' feelings about the functional image (appearance designs, durable materials, and ergonomics), symbolic image (personal image, positive images, and desired style), and experiential image (need for practicality, pleasure, and diversification) of counterfeit sport shoes. The third part was a brand awareness scale and included five questions. The main purpose was to understand the reasons for consideration by college students who want to purchase counterfeit sport shoes, including well-known brands, celebrity or star endorsements, good quality, affordable prices, and individual needs. The fourth part was the information search scale and included five questions. The main purpose was to understand whether college students ask others for opinions before considering purchasing counterfeit sport shoes and communicate with others to obtain more information about counterfeit sport shoes.

The fifth part was the price-performance ratio scale and included three questions. The main purpose was to understand whether college students, before considering purchasing counterfeit sport shoes, consider such items are worth purchasing after comparing them with previously purchased sport shoes, whether the price is cheap, and whether the purchased sport shoes are not so different from the original. The sixth part was the purchase intention scale and included three questions. The main purpose was to understand the plan of college students who want to purchase counterfeit sport shoes, as well as the sneaker brands they want to purchase. The final part was the student's basic personal information, including gender and grade.

3.3. Data Analysis

This study conducted the statistical analysis using the following two tools. 1. SPSS for Windows 26.0 software was employed to analyze the distribution and percentage of statistics, as well as the distribution of the background variables of students. 2. Warp PLS 8.0 statistical software was used for the partial further squares (PLS) statistical method to analyze the functional needs, symbolic needs, experiential needs, information search, price, brand awareness, the price-performance ratio, purchase intention, as well as to test the hypotheses.

4. Results

4.1. Reliability and Validity Analysis

From the analysis results of Table 1, the composite reliability (CR) of the eight latent variables in the scales of this study reached more than .80, and the Cronbach's α values were all higher than .70, indicating that the scales in this study had a high degree of reliability. In terms of validity, from the analysis results, the AVE of each latent variable was higher than .50, indicating all latent variables had good convergent validity.

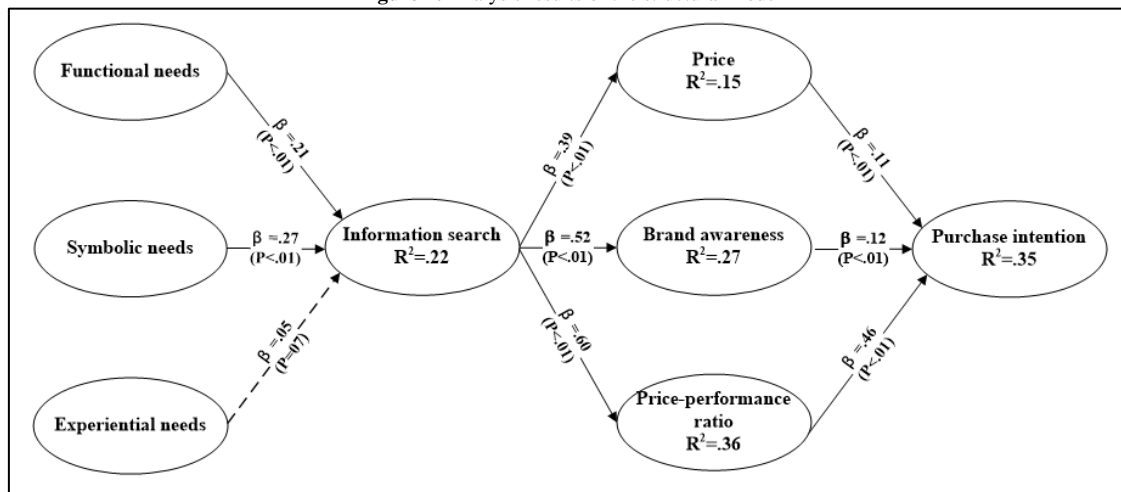
Table-1. Confirmatory factor analysis results

Latent Variables/ Purchasing experience	CR	Cronbach's α	AVE
Price	.94	.92	.76
Functional needs	.90	.82	.74
Experiential needs	.93	.83	.74
Symbolic needs	.93	.89	.82
Brand awareness	.93	.82	.58
Information search	.89	.84	.62
Price-performance ratio	.85	.73	.65
Purchase intention	.95	.92	.86

4.2. Hypothesis Verification

According to Figure 1, functional needs ($\beta=.21$, $p<.01$) and symbolic needs ($\beta=.27$, $p<.01$) had a positive effect on information search, but experiential needs had no direct effect on information search ($\beta=.05$, $p=.07$). Furthermore, information search had a positive effect on price ($\beta=.39$, $p<.01$), brand awareness ($\beta=.52$, $p<.01$), and price-performance ratio ($\beta=.60$, $p<.01$). Price ($\beta=.11$, $p<.01$), brand awareness ($\beta=.12$, $p<.01$), and price-performance ratio ($\beta=.46$, $p<.01$) had a positive effect on purchase intention.

Figure-1. Analysis results of the structural model



In terms of explanatory power, first of all, functional needs and symbolic needs had a predictive power of 22% for information search, had a predictive power of 15% for price, had a predictive power of 27% for brand awareness, and had a predictive power of 36% for the price-performance ratio. The last six latent variables had a predictive power of 35% for purchase intention regarding counterfeit sport shoes. In terms of the suitability of the model, $APC=.304$ ($p<.001$), $ARS=.268$ ($p<.001$), and $AVIF=1.736$ (acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3), indicating that the model of this study was good. Table 2 reports the results of the hypothesis tests.

Table-2. The results of the hypothesis tests

Hypothesis	Path coefficients(β)	Test result
H1: Functional needs \rightarrow Information search	.21**	Support
H2: Symbolic needs \rightarrow Information search	.27**	Support
H3: Experiential needs \rightarrow Information search	.04	No Support
H4: Information search \rightarrow Price	.39**	Support
H5: Information search \rightarrow Brand awareness	.52**	Support
H6: Information search \rightarrow Price-performance ratio	.60**	Support
H7: Price \rightarrow Purchase intention	.11**	Support
H8: Brand awareness \rightarrow Purchase intention	.12**	Support
H9: Price-performance ratio \rightarrow Purchase intention	.46**	Support
Model fit indicators: APC = .304 ($p < .001$), ARS = .268 ($p < .001$), AVIF = 1.736 (acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3)		

** $p < .01$

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

According to the analysis results, eight of the nine hypotheses proposed in this study were supported. First, in terms of needs, this study found that functional needs and symbolic needs were the reasons that promoted the purchase of counterfeit sport shoes by college students. Therefore, when the above needs arose, the students would search for information about counterfeit sport shoes. However, this study found that experiential needs had no influence; that is, the students did not have strong needs for practicality, pleasure, and diversification in terms of the needs for purchasing counterfeit sport shoes.

Furthermore, this study found that after realizing the functional and symbolic needs of sport shoes, the college students searched for product information about counterfeit sport shoes. The results of this study are in line with the EKB model proposed by Engel *et al.* (1984), in which consumers, after recognizing the need, will begin to search for suitable solutions that meet their needs. In terms of information research, they would consult friends and relatives, as well as browse reviews and word of mouth on social networking platforms (Erkan and Evans, 2018). Consumers purchase counterfeits because they are cheaper and similar to the original, which can meet the needs of consumers (Francis *et al.*, 2015). The researcher hence suggested that the opinions of peer groups on social networking platforms would have the greatest effect on whether college students purchase counterfeit sport shoes. This result is in line with previous studies which found that during online communication on social networking sites, peer opinions are seen as helpful in obtaining information and evaluating products (Grange and Benbasat, 2018).

Moreover, it was found that after the college students search for information about counterfeit sport shoes, the price, brand awareness, and price-performance ratio had a positive effect on college students' intention to purchase counterfeit sport shoes. This study confirmed that price was the main consideration when college students purchased counterfeit sport shoes. This also supported the results of previous studies that found a low price is the reason consumers purchase counterfeits (Orth *et al.*, 2019). In addition, when purchasing counterfeit sport shoes, college students considered not only the price but also whether the counterfeit is a well-known brand, whether a celebrity endorsement is used (referring to the original), and whether the product is in line with today's fashion trends. The results of this study and that of Lu (2019) confirm that the need for uniqueness and brand spokespersons influences consumers' purchasing decisions before they make a decision to purchase Chinese-made sport shoes. In addition, the results were similar to the findings of Zhou *et al.* (2020) that the use of sports stars' personal brands is positively related to global brand equity and brand affection.

This study revealed an interesting finding regarding price-performance ratios. The researcher found that college students also have the psychology of early adopters when purchasing counterfeit sport shoes. College students try to purchase counterfeit sport shoes because they think they are less different from the original. The results of this study were similar to the finding of Lu (2019) study, which found that the price-performance ratio, price, and early adopter mentality affect consumers' purchase intention before making the decision to purchase Chinese-made sport shoes.

Based on the above, the following conclusions are drawn from this study: First, college students' needs for counterfeit sport shoes are mainly functional and symbolic needs. When these two needs become stronger, students would begin to search for information about counterfeit sport shoes and evaluate their purchasing behaviors. Second, after searching for information on counterfeit sport shoes, college students mainly consider price, brand awareness, and price-performance ratios, which affect their purchase intentions.

5.2. Practical Implications

The results of this study showed that the needs of college students for sport shoes are mainly functional needs and symbolic needs. However, well-known brand sport shoes are unaffordable for ordinary college students due to their high prices. Sneaker manufacturers can design and manufacture sport shoes using this aspect to meet the needs of college students and young people. Furthermore, government agencies can be combined to explain the importance of safeguarding intellectual property rights and the harm of counterfeit sport shoes to the development of market economies to online social groups and schools, so as to strengthen the law-abiding concept of college students and young people. In addition, this study found that counterfeits are cheap and not so different from the original, and that college students purchase these items because they will not feel distressed if the counterfeits wear out. Therefore,

sneaker manufacturers and sellers need to consider market needs in their product launches and pricings, and they should launch products that can meet the needs of college students and young people.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

First of all, this study conducted surveys on students who had and had not purchased counterfeit sport shoes. However, the samples were limited to students, and consumers from other social classes were not surveyed. Therefore, it is suggested that future researchers consider distributing questionnaires to people of different ages via online platforms to find out whether they have the need to purchase counterfeit sport shoes. In addition, consumers who have purchased counterfeit sport shoes can be surveyed to understand their purchase needs, product information sources, main purchase methods, and post-purchase use. In terms of the addition of variables, this study found that experiential needs had no direct effect. This study suggests that future researchers can consider adding the need for popularity in terms of the addition of variables. For those who have purchasing experience, the number of questions can be adjusted or the content of the items can be added to the questionnaire items regarding brand awareness.

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