



RESEARCH PAPER

Unveiling Brand Piracy: Examining Consumer Perception of Counterfeit Products in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the issue of brand piracy in Pakistan, specifically delving into consumer perceptions of counterfeit products. The study investigates how personality traits, product development, and moral and ethical concerns impact consumers' evaluations of these products. Considering the socio-economic and cultural diversity of Pakistan, the research explores the various factors influencing consumer behavior. The findings underscore the significant role played by personality traits like materialism and status consumption in shaping consumers' views of inauthentic products. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of perceived quality, especially in the context of developing economies like Pakistan. It underscores the nuanced impact of ethical considerations within social norms and economic realities. In essence, the research advocates for a balanced approach that considers cultural values, ethical considerations, and economic advantages to foster sustainable organizational practices and legal frameworks.

KEYWORDS

Brand Piracy, Consumer Perception, Counterfeit Products, Theory of Reasoned Action

Introduction

Counterfeit products are common in the developing country such as Pakistan, which attracts manufacturers by its potential profitability and low risk (Hussain et al., 2017). This illicit trade creates challenges for businesses and distorts consumer choice, so addressing these issues is critical to sustainable development. Even though consumers are looking for authentic products, the availability of fake products is prompting them to buy these products. The absence of consumer protection regulations and enforcement gaps exacerbate this problem (Goyens, 2020). Understanding the motivations behind individuals' decisions to purchase counterfeit products is essential to promoting sustainable consumption and ethical production patterns (Alyahya, 2023). Recent studies focus on understanding customer attitudes and behaviors during such purchases.

Consumer preference for counterfeit products is increasing, as observed by Elsantil (2021), who found that around 70% of participants engaged in such purchases. Some customers believe counterfeit goods match the quality of genuine products (Agarwal et al., 2016). Counterfeit products, designed to deceive customers into thinking they are genuine, coexist with authentic items, posing financial losses and reputational damage to businesses. Consumers knowingly and willingly choose to buy counterfeit items, creating a competitive challenge for legitimate businesses due to the lack of rigorous safety regulations (Khan, 2021). People are motivated to buy counterfeit luxury products to gain social status and prestige while avoiding the high costs of genuine items (Kassim et al., 2021; Akhtar et al., 2023; Hongyun et al., 2023; Naveed et al., 2023).

Martinez and Jaeger (2016) reviewed studies exploring the moral and ethical implications of acquiring counterfeit products, supporting the belief that material possessions are associated with success and happiness (Fritze, 2020; Dakhan et al., 2020; Mirani et al., 2021; Sohu et al., 2020). These aspects highlight the intricate relationship between consumer behavior, industry, and ethical considerations, fostering an ethically conscious and financially stable consumer environment.

Global counterfeit markets have proliferated, impacting various industries and consumer preferences worldwide. This emerging problem requires attention from organizations and regulatory bodies. Consumer behavior, influenced by social, cultural, and psychological elements, involves motivations like the pursuit of prestige and materialistic ownership. In a context where economic considerations often take precedence over moral considerations, the ethical dimension, influenced by morality, shapes consumer perceptions and decision-making. To combat counterfeit consumption successfully, a comprehensive understanding of the interacting factors is crucial. This study examines the influence of societal consumption, materialism and morality on consumers in Pakistan, including another variable 'product quality performance (Shah et al., 2021; Sohu et al., 2022). By addressing factors influencing consumer behavior, the study contributes to achieving sustainable consumption and ethical patterns of production, supports industry, innovation and infrastructure, and responsible consumption and production. It emphasizes building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and promoting innovation (Iqbal et al., 2023; Junejo et al., 2022; Sohu, Hongyun, et al., 2020). The study directly aligns with this goal by investigating the impact of counterfeiting on industries, highlighting the need for robust regulatory frameworks to ensure ethical and sustainable business practices. On the other hand, it focuses on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, emphasizing responsible consumption, and urging industries to adopt eco-friendly practices. The study's exploration of factors influencing consumer behavior and its potential implications for industries align with the goal of promoting responsible consumption and ethical production

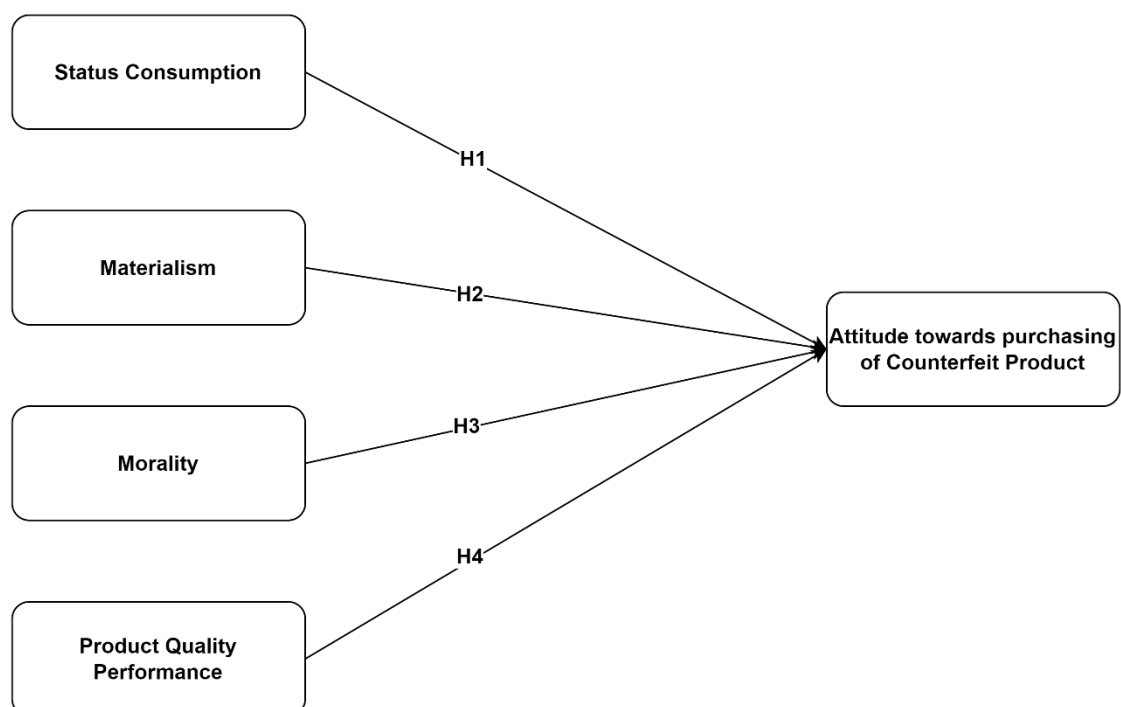


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

Theoretical background

This study introduces the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), originally proposed by Sheppard et al. (1988), as a means to predict and understand the factors that influence an individual's behavior. The theory posits that an individual's intention to engage in a specific behavior is influenced by both their attitude and subjective norms. The theory comprises three essential constructs: behavioral intention, attitude, and subjective norm (Junejo et al., 2020; Junejo & Muhammad, 2018). Behavioral intention refers to the individual's subjective likelihood and perceived strength of intending to engage in a particular behavior. Sheppard et al. (1988) define attitude as an individual's evaluative stance, either positive or negative, towards engaging in a specific behavior. Subjective norms pertain to an individual's perception of the approval or disapproval of certain behaviors by specific individuals. Norms encompass the perceived expectations for individuals to engage in particular behaviors.

The theory of reasoned action acknowledges the significance of social and attitudinal factors in influencing particular behaviors. The author or source cited is Han (2021). The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is a social psychological model that seeks to elucidate the relationship between attitudes, social norms, and behavior in the comprehension of human behavior. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) posits that an individual's intention to engage in a specific behavior is shaped by subjective norms and attitudes. This intention subsequently translates into observable actions. According to Malik et al. (2020), the theory of reasoned action (TRA) proposes that a consumer's inclination to purchase counterfeit products is influenced by their attitude towards the product and their subjective norm, which is associated with perceived social pressure. The behavior of individuals ultimately reflects their intentions (Junejo et al., 2018; Sohu et al., 2019, 2023). The perceptions of counterfeit brands and products in Pakistan are shaped by various factors, such as individual values, evaluations of the advantages and disadvantages of buying them, and perceived risks. Subjective norms pertain to an individual's perception of the social influence placed upon them to conform to a particular behavior. Norms regarding the purchase of counterfeit goods can be shaped by several factors, including the social norms of the consumer's peer group, their perception of how common counterfeit products are, and their personal beliefs about the acceptability of purchasing counterfeit goods (Faria, 2013).

Hypotheses Development

Status consumption and attitude of Pakistani consumers toward purchasing counterfeit products

Ian (2009) research explained that status management is a way for individuals to improve their social status and gain influence by using specific resources. In contrast, a study by Ting (2016) did find a negative relationship between the intention to buy counterfeit luxury products and status consumption, status seekers have a negative attitude towards buying fake products. According to Teah et al. (2015) study investigated how personality traits influence consumers' perceptions of fake luxury purchases. The findings suggest that positional resources play an important role in shaping these attitudes and also positively affect purchase intentions. In a study conducted by D. Kim and Jang (2014), it was found that Generation Y relies on their parents' limited income to meet their needs, while also exhibiting a higher likelihood of having status compared to Baby Boomers. In order to level their status with others, customers from a particular

culture make use of a diverse range of goods (Lee & Workman, 2011). The creation of the following hypothesis for the study was a result of various studies examining the influence of status consumption on the purchase of counterfeit products.

H1: Status consumption behavior significantly influences the attitude of Pakistani consumers toward purchasing counterfeit products.

Materialism and the attitude of Pakistani consumers toward purchasing counterfeit products.

Consuming habits are the only aspect that materialism, a psychological trait, is associated with. According to Ian (2009), materialists favor symbolic products over everyday items and engage in excessive consumption of material things. Materialism, believed to be a reflection of happiness and success through the possession of things and material objects, has been extensively studied and identified as a core value (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012). According to Ting (2016), individuals who are materialistic and face financial constraints are more likely to purchase counterfeit products. A hypothesis was developed to examine the effect of materialism on attitudes toward the purchase of counterfeit goods.

H2: Materialism significantly impacts the attitude of Pakistani consumers toward purchasing counterfeit products.

Ethical values or morality of Pakistani consumers and their attitude toward purchasing counterfeit products.

One's honesty is manifested with a sense of integrity, which is an essential part of morality. The findings of the study suggest a negative and significant relationship between ethics and counterfeit consumer purchases. This means that individuals who strictly adhere to the principles of the rule of law often refuse to buy counterfeit goods. On the other hand, some studies show that there are consumers who are interested in buying counterfeit products; they do not see this behavior as moral or ethical. It would be interesting to observe the behavior of Pakistani consumers in terms of ethical standards and ethical standards of various kinds, especially attitudes toward buying counterfeit goods. A hypothesis was developed to further investigate this area:

H3: There is a significant relationship between the ethical values or morality of Pakistani consumers and their attitude toward purchasing counterfeit products.

Product quality performance and the attitude of Pakistani consumers toward purchasing counterfeit products

Perfection or superiority is the most general description of product quality. A product is any offering that can be presented to the market for payment, acquisition, use or consumption and has the potential to fulfill a want or need (Razak & Nirwanto, 2016). The consumer determines the perceived quality or superiority of a product over similar products with respect to its intended use, as reported by a 2015 study by Yaw Brew. When deciding whether to purchase a product, customers rely on this information to ensure that it meets their requirements and provides value for money. According to Tanner (2012), the significance of product performance is much higher for counterfeit goods. Customers who have been persuaded to buy have unfortunately been persuaded to buy counterfeit goods, which often turn out to be of lower quality and may not work as effectively as genuine products. As a result, these customers may feel dissatisfied. This is especially true for products that can compromise consumer safety, including

counterfeit electronics, chemicals, and automotive components Tseng et al. (2021), consumers are less likely to buy counterfeit products if they believe that authentic products perform well.

H4: Product quality performance significantly affects the attitude of Pakistani consumers toward purchasing counterfeit products.

Material and Methods

Sample and Data Collection Process

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional research design. The sample includes consumers living in Pakistan, mainly urban middle-class citizens. These individuals represent the urban population in Pakistan where there is a higher prevalence of counterfeit and second or third copy goods being bought and sold. Gani et al. (2019) found that urban middle-class citizens have a higher propensity to purchase counterfeits compared to other segments of the population, consistent with their previous research. One possible reason is that counterfeit products are priced lower, making them more affordable for lower-income individuals. In addition, Phau et al. (2009) suggest that individuals living in middle-class urban areas who cannot afford authentic branded products choose to purchase counterfeit items to achieve the same level of visibility and status typically associated with genuine products. Due to absence of sampling framework for, the study had to use a non-probability convenience sampling method. The researchers chose this sampling technique because it aligned with the study's objectives. The selection process was designed to recruit respondents who were easily reachable and readily available. This ensured that the data collection process was feasible and efficient. In addition, it allowed for the involvement of a sufficient number of participants to achieve the research objectives. The data collection process involved the use of self-administered online questionnaires. These questionnaires were distributed through popular social media platforms such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Facebook. In addition, the researchers use a survey method to collect data from the Sindh provinces of Pakistan. 114 participants participated in the study, all of whom are customers living in Pakistan. Of the participants, 56.1 percent identified themselves as male, while 42.1 percent identified as female.

Data Collection instruments

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Ian et al. (2009) to better adapt to the specific conditions of the study. Data were collected from participants using a self-administered online questionnaire, which proved to be an effective method. Part A examined buying behavior and reasons with a series of 10 questions. These questions measured the frequency of purchasing genuine or counterfeit goods and the importance participants placed on values using a 5-point scale. Section B explored participants' opinions of legitimate and fake fashion and lifestyle brands. A 7-point scale was used to assess the degree of agreement or disagreement with statements regarding brand perception, attractiveness, authenticity, and trustworthiness. Section C explored participants' views on the use of status-enhancing commodities using a 7-point scale to assess attitudes toward the function and importance of these items in communicating social status. Part D sought to ascertain individuals' opinions and actions on material consumption using a 7-point scale that provided seven questions. Part E mainly examined ethical aspects and decision-making in consumer behavior. It included three questions that were rated on a 7-point scale to measure participants' ethical concerns and the importance of ethics in their consumer behavior. The aforementioned sections offered

significant perspectives on participants' buying preferences, motivations, and brand attitudes, perspectives on status-enhancing products, material consumption, and ethical concerns in consumer decision-making.

Table 1
Respondents' Demographic Profile

Respondents' Demographic Profile (n = 114)		
Criterion	Characteristics	Percentage
Gender	Male	56.1
	Female	42.1
	Prefer not to say	1.8
Age	25 or below	20.2
	26 - 30	55.3
	31 - 39	21.9
	40 or above	2.6
Monthly Income	50,000 or below	17.5
	60,000 - 100,000	30.7
	110,000 - 150,000	21.1
	160,000 - 200,000	14.9
	200,000 or above	5.3
	Prefer not to say	10.5
Qualification	Intermediate	3.5
	Graduation	48.2
	Masters	47.4
	Ph.D	0.9

The demographic profile of the 114 respondents in this study provides valuable insights into the characteristics of the sample. In terms of gender distribution, 56.1% identified as male, while 42.1% identified as female. A small percentage, 1.8%, preferred not to disclose their gender. When considering age groups, the majority of respondents, 55.3%, fell within the 26-30 age bracket. Additionally, 20.2% were 25 years or below, 21.9% were in the 31-39 age range, and a smaller portion, 2.6%, were 40 years or above.

Examining monthly income, 30.7% of respondents reported earning between 60,000 and 100,000, making it the most common income bracket. Furthermore, 17.5% had a monthly income of 50,000 or below, 21.1% earned between 110,000 and 150,000, 14.9% earned between 160,000 and 200,000, and 5.3% had a monthly income of 200,000 or above, A notable 10.5% preferred not to disclose their income. Regarding educational qualifications, the majority of respondents, 48.2%, held a graduation degree, while 47.4% had a master's degree. A smaller percentage, 3.5%, had an intermediate qualification, and an even smaller proportion, 0.9%, possessed a Ph.D. This demographic breakdown provides a clear snapshot of the diverse composition of the respondent sample, encompassing various genders, age groups, income levels, and educational qualifications.

Data Analytical Tool

This study utilized the data analytical tool SPSS to analyze collected data. SPSS, known as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, provided an efficient and user-friendly interface for data entry, management, and analysis. The software's diverse statistical procedures and visualization tools played a crucial role in interpreting the dataset and deriving meaningful insights for the study.

Result and Discussion

Table 2
Reliability Analysis

Scale	N	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Attitude toward Counterfeits	114	0.882	5
Materialism	114	0.884	7
Morality	114	0.796	3
Status Consumption	114	0.906	5

The reliability analysis conducted in this study indicates strong internal consistency for the measurement scales. The scales assessing participants' attitudes toward counterfeits, materialism, and status consumption demonstrated high reliability with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.882, 0.884, and 0.906, respectively. The morality scale demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach alpha of 0.796. These findings indicate that the items in each scale reliably measure the target construct, enhance the reliability of the survey results and confirm the robustness of the measure used.

Table 3
Multiple Regressions

Predictors	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-2.953	0.87	-3.394	0.001		
Status Consumption	0.782	0.126	6.215	0	0.79	1.265
Materialism	0.555	0.167	3.329	0.001	0.785	1.274
Morality	0.234	0.077	3.034	0.003	0.758	1.319
ANOVA	Sig.	R	Adjusted R-Square			
Overall Model	0	0.73	0.533			

The purpose of the multiple regression analysis in this study was to examine the determinants of perceptions of counterfeits. The model includes three dimensions: status consumption, materialism, and morality. The results indicate that the model is statistically significant (ANOVA, $p < 0.001$), indicating that at least one predictor significantly contributes to explaining the variance in intention to counterfeits. The individual predictors also exhibit significance, with Status Consumption ($\beta = 0.782$, $p < 0.001$), Materialism ($\beta = 0.555$, $p < 0.001$), and Morality ($\beta = 0.234$, $p = 0.003$) all making significant contributions. The adjusted R-square of 0.533 indicates that these predictors together explain 53.3% of the variance in perceptions of counterfeit items. Tolerance values (ranging from 0.758 to 0.79) and VIF values (ranging from 1.265 to 1.319) indicate that multicollinearity is not a significant issue.

Table 4
Pearson Correlation

Pearson Correlation	N	Sig.	Pearson Correlation
Product Performance * Attitude toward Counterfeits	114	0	0.655

The Pearson correlation analysis conducted in this study reveals a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.655$, $p < 0.001$) between Product Performance and Attitude toward Counterfeits. This indicates that as the participants' attitudes towards products increase, their attitudes toward inaccuracies also become more positive. Strong positive correlations show a significant relationship between perceived quality and individual perceptions of counterfeit substitutes. This finding highlights the potential influence of exposure perceptions in shaping consumer attitudes toward counterfeit brands.

Discussion

The study's findings offer a detailed insight into the factors shaping consumer attitudes towards counterfeit products in Pakistan, aligning with the initially proposed hypotheses. The first hypothesis, asserting that status consumption behavior significantly impacts Pakistani consumers' attitudes toward purchasing counterfeits, receives backing from the multiple regression analysis. The results show that individuals inclined towards status consumption are more likely to hold positive attitudes, affirming the expected connection. The second hypothesis, which posited a significant impact of materialism on Pakistani consumers' attitudes toward counterfeit purchases, finds support in the regression analysis. A positive and significant relationship between materialism and favorable attitudes indicates that consumers with stronger materialistic tendencies are more likely to view counterfeit products positively.

The third hypothesis, suggesting a significant link between the ethical values or morality of Pakistani consumers and their attitude toward counterfeit purchases, gains support from the regression analysis, it indicates that individuals with lower moral considerations are more likely to harbor positive attitudes towards counterfeit products, highlighting the role of moral perspectives in shaping consumer choices. The fourth hypothesis proposing a significant influence of product quality performance on Pakistani consumers' attitudes toward counterfeit purchases is supported by the Pearson correlation analysis. The strong positive correlation between perceived product performance and positive attitudes implies that as consumers perceive higher product quality, their attitudes towards counterfeit alternatives become more positive.

Conclusions

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of consumer attitudes toward counterfeit products in Pakistan. The alignment of the findings with the initially proposed hypotheses emphasizes the significant roles of status consumption, materialism, morality, and product performance in shaping consumer choices. The practical implications underscore the need for businesses and policymakers to adopt tailored strategies that resonate with the socio-economic and ethical considerations of Pakistani consumers. As the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge, it also opens avenues for future research to explore the broader landscape of counterfeit consumption, considering diverse demographics and cultural influences. Ultimately, by addressing the limitations and building on these findings, researchers and practitioners can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in the context of counterfeit products.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes a valuable theoretical contribution by incorporating the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) into the exploration of consumer attitudes towards counterfeit products in Pakistan. Building on TRA's constructs of attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral intentions, the study delves into the intricate interplay of individual beliefs, societal pressures, and purchasing intentions specific to counterfeit goods. This theoretical framework allows for a nuanced understanding of consumer decision-making, enriching the study's depth and providing insights that can inform future research in the realm of consumer behavior. Overall, the integration of TRA enhances the theoretical foundation of the study, offering a comprehensive lens through which to examine the complexities of consumer attitudes towards counterfeit consumption in a unique socio-cultural context.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study hold practical implications for businesses, policymakers, and regulatory bodies in navigating the landscape of counterfeit consumption in Pakistan. Understanding the significant influence of status consumption, materialism, morality, and product performance on consumer attitudes towards counterfeit products is crucial for developing targeted strategies. Businesses can utilize these insights to tailor marketing and pricing strategies, emphasizing authentic brand experiences and ethical considerations. Policymakers and regulatory bodies may find value in crafting consumer protection regulations that address the prevalence of counterfeit goods, ultimately fostering a more secure and informed consumer environment in Pakistan.

Limitations and Future Avenues of Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The research focused on a specific demographic, namely middle-class urban citizens, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other population segments. Additionally, the study relied on self-administered online questionnaires, which could introduce response bias. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the demographic scope and employing diverse data collection methods, such as interviews or observational studies. Exploring the role of cultural nuances in counterfeit consumption could also be a fruitful avenue for further research.

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