



Consumer concern, knowledge, and attitude towards counterfeit apparel products: An application of the theory of reasoned action theory

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Counterfeiting involves creating products that are nearly identical to trade-name goods. Companies that produce counterfeit goods have been linked to terrorism, the international drug trade, and sweatshop conditions in both domestic and international settings (International anti-counterfeiting, 2004). In years past, counterfeit goods were easy to identify because these products were typically made with shoddy materials and sold in limited venues such as open air markets in large, cosmopolitan cities like New York and Los Angeles. Due to technological advances in materials and processing techniques, many counterfeit goods have found their way to brick and mortar retail stores and even to “purse parties” in suburban America. At these purse parties, consumers buy “designer” items at the modest price of \$25-50 a bag. According to some within the apparel industry and governmental agencies, purse party consumers, are the new drug dealers of a different sort of underground product (Ingrassia, 2004).

Using the theory of reasoned action (TRA) as a theoretical framework, this research investigates the relationship of three variables (concern with apparel industry issues, knowledge about counterfeiting, and attitude towards counterfeit apparel products) with consumer willingness toward paying a premium for non-counterfeit goods. The TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) suggests that people consider the consequences of alternative behaviors before engaging in them, and that they choose to perform behaviors they associate with desirable outcomes. In Fishbein and Ajzen’s model, behavioral intent is derived from attitudes and beliefs toward a behavior and the perceived social pressure associated with the behavior. This research focuses primarily on consumers’ concern, knowledge, and attitude towards counterfeit apparel and their intention to engage in the behavior of paying additional monies to consume non-counterfeit apparel goods.

A survey instrument was employed. Participants were provided with a twenty-three measure of their concern, knowledge, attitude, and willingness to pay more for counterfeit apparel goods. Reliability coefficients of 0.81 (concern), 0.86 (knowledge), 0.84 (attitude), and 0.88 (willingness to pay more) were obtained. A sample of 108 was selected from an undergraduate apparel merchandising, design, and production undergraduate class at a large Midwestern university. The majority of the students were female students between the ages of 18 and 19. Many of the participants had experience with purchasing counterfeit apparel themselves (44%) and knew of someone who had purchased counterfeit apparel (84%).

Data were analyzed using factor analyses, reliability analyses, analysis of variance, and path analysis. As predicted by the TRA, a positive, significant relationship between concern for



apparel industry issues and willingness to pay more for non-counterfeit apparel products was found. Although consumer knowledge did not impact willingness to pay more for counterfeit goods, knowledge did have an indirect, yet significant influence through the variable of concern to willingness to pay more. Attitude towards counterfeit apparel goods had a significant, negative influence on willingness to pay more for counterfeit goods.

As the apparel industry, government, unions, and activist groups have long called on consumers to assist in the elimination of sweatshop conditions, the demand for counterfeit goods continues into the twenty-first century (Ingrassia 2004). Despite the attention given to eradicating sweatshops, international campaigns seldom focus on the concern, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of the consumer. Instead the opprobrium is placed on the producers of the fakes. While the eradication of counterfeiting is a fantasy, consumer education as well as government action could curb some abuses (Ang, Cheng, Lin & Tambyah, 2001; Zaichowsky, 1986). This research suggests that consumer concern with apparel industry issues will lead to a willingness to pay more for non-counterfeit goods.

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