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# The Counterfeit Goods Conundrum: An Analysis Of Demand Situation Among Malaysian Consumers

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*Abstract — This paper examines the tricky and confusing problem of counterfeit goods demand. Counterfeit activities are getting more rampant, sophisticated and aggressive on a worldwide basis. Malaysia remains an ideal transit hub for counterfeit goods and regarded as lack in placing a premium on intellectual property rights. There is a need to address this conundrum of consumers who are fully aware of this illegal trade but continue to patronize. Measures undertaken by government dealt mainly with supply side of counterfeit goods but there is lack of effort on demand side control. An analysis into consumer attitude towards demand for counterfeit goods focusing on factors influencing purchase is warranted. This study utilized the integrated model of counterfeit goods purchase by Matos et al. (2007). Methodology entailed survey approach on 150 users at a locality in Kuala Lumpur. Findings showed positive and significant relationships between perceived risk, integrity and status as predictors of consumer attitude towards counterfeit goods. Findings provided implications for anti-counterfeit measures to go beyond awareness, communication and information on risks but more on emotional closeness to the consumer. Changing mindsets is necessary making clear to consumers that counterfeit purchase is stealing. Companies can be proactive by revealing the depth and breadth of counterfeiting and creating public consciousness.*

*Keywords: Counterfeit, demand-side, perceived risk, price-quality, status, integrity*

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## I. Introduction

Counterfeiting activity is defined as the act of producing or selling a product containing an intentional and calculated reproduction of a genuine trademark (Phoyomrattanaaphajit n.d). A counterfeit mark is identical to or substantially indistinguishable from a genuine mark (McCarthy, 2004). Consumers wanting to have an identity associated with prestige brands and with their users might acquire these goods in an attempt to be accepted as equals by significant others (Castano, 2010). Counterfeit activities are getting more sophisticated and aggressive. The main reason is because of the continuous demand from the consumers who want to get a product at a more affordable price and beyond their capability to buy genuine products especially the top established brands. In this scenario, they buy counterfeit goods because it offers a lower price compared to the genuine one. In addition, the fake goods they buy also look quite similar and most of the counterfeiters are great in copying the genuine ones.

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Lai and Zaichkowsky (1999, p.179-192) defined counterfeits as illegally made products that resemble the genuine goods but are typically of lower quality in terms of performance, reliability, or durability. The study is an attempt to examine the consumer attitude towards purchasing counterfeit goods. Customer attitude that leads towards purchasing counterfeit goods could be because of price quality inference, risk averseness, perceived risk in counterfeit purchase, integrity and personal gratification. These factors are examined in this study as factors that could drive consumers to buy counterfeits.

Moreover, customers in the market perceive genuine goods as quality and costly and due to the lower price of counterfeit goods it catches the attention of customer to buy and consume the product compared to the genuine one. In addition, customers face threats in term of consuming the counterfeit goods because counterfeit goods are sometimes harmful and it doesn't reflect the genuine one. According to Cordell et al., (1996) research shows that consumer's willingness to purchase counterfeit products is negatively related to attitude towards lawfulness. In this situation it reflects towards customer integrity. Furthermore, Personal gratification concerns the need for a sense of accomplishment, social recognition, and to enjoy the finer things in life (Ang et al., 2001).

## **II. Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of the study are:

- 1) To examine whether price-quality inference affects consumer attitude towards counterfeit purchase
- 2) To examine whether perceived risk affects consumer attitude towards counterfeit purchase
- 3) To examine whether integrity affects attitude towards counterfeit purchase
- 4) To examine personal gratification influence attitude towards counterfeit purchase

## **III. Literature Review**

There is continuous demand from consumers for counterfeit products sold at affordable price when it is beyond their capability to buy the genuine products especially the top established brands. Malaysia along with Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar remain as ideal transit hubs for counterfeit goods and are grouped as countries that do not place a premium on intellectual property rights.

Since 2011, Malaysia has appeared on the Office of the US Trade Representative's (USTR) watch list of counterfeiting and IPR violations. Statistics showed that from 2004 to 2008, the value of counterfeit goods seized throughout Malaysia was more than a record of RM212 million. Despite the many enforcement efforts taken by the Malaysian government to curtail piracy and counterfeiting, the number of reported cases still continues to grow. However in 2012 and 2013, Malaysia was off this watch list showing increased effective government efforts to curb this menace (Abraham and Toh, 2012). Reported evidence of seizures of counterfeit goods by Malaysian authorities from 2012 to 2014 was mainly from East Malaysia (<http://borneopost.com>).

It appears the counterfeit conundrum is a worldwide phenomenon and has plagued Malaysia too. Counterfeiting in Malaysia is usually associated with branded goods. This disease has now spread widely to Malaysian soil and as a consequence, consumers have repeatedly been exposed to the "ill-gotten fruits" of counterfeits in their daily lives as these items are now circulating in the form of essential products used on a daily basis. Counterfeit items have expanded from branded handbags to shoes and health products and medicine. The sources of distribution channel have evolved from offline to online channels as online shopping becomes popular. There is no actual means of monitoring distribution of counterfeit products via online shopping. Therefore, this study analyzes the demand situation of the counterfeit goods and what are the direct influencers of such negative consumption.

Consumers in the society patronize counterfeit goods because it is easy to get and are much cheaper than the genuine ones. Some of them are willing to pay for counterfeit goods because of the price. Several past studies have shown that consumers are still demanding more of counterfeit goods. Cordell et al. (1996) found three motivators for counterfeit consumption, namely status symbol of the brand, retail distribution channel and price of counterfeit product. Prendergast et al. (2002) stated attitudes toward morality and lawfulness are possible discretionary indicators in the purchase of counterfeit goods.

Millers (1999) found a significant role of the risk factor on the purchasing of counterfeits like the product does not perform as well as an original item and there is no warranty from the seller. In this advanced information age, consumers are fully aware of the consequences and risks of consuming counterfeit goods e.g. counterfeit medicine can be harmful to health or wearing the fake watch that is not going to work properly like the genuine one. However seeking counterfeit goods and willingness to pay is still rampant. Hence this

necessitates an investigation into factors that drive them to demand such goods. This study investigates whether price/quality inference and perceived risk factors influencing consumer attitude towards counterfeit purchase.

Table 1.0 provides evidences of past studies on predictors in the purchase intention of counterfeit goods by Malaysians. Past studies revealed that subjective or individual factors do play a significant influence in counterfeit purchase. More importantly subjective and personality factors were strong predictors of attitude towards counterfeit purchase. Among the individual factors influencing demand for counterfeits in recent studies were ethics and materialism (Ong et al., 2013); brand loyalty (Ng and Choy, 2012); novelty seeking (Harun et al., 2012) and social influence and personality (Haque et al., 2012). This study adds to the gap by examining status recognition and sense of accomplishment seeking as personal gratification factors that could affect Malaysian consumer attitude towards counterfeit goods. By analyzing subjective factors such as personality traits could assist in addressing measures to influence the demand side of counterfeit goods. Supply side measures such as economic counter measures in the form of border controls and enforcement of intellectual property laws are widespread in Malaysia but there is a lack of effort to influence the demand side stressing on the emotion and mindset of users.

#### IV. Methodology

Samples of the study comprise consumers living at Kampong Baru, Kuala Lumpur, which is mainly populated by Malays. The study selected this sample of population as respondents because they are surrounded by counterfeit goods sold openly in the vicinity and bazaars. This study uses the sampling design similar to a past study by Matos et al. (2007) in which the sample population was from an area where many counterfeit goods are accessible. Using purposive sampling method, this study narrowed down the scope to only focus on respondents along Jalan Raja Alang, in the location of Kampung Baru. This area has been known to be a popular spot for purchasing counterfeit goods. The area is a high density area, with suitable and accessible respondents who have encountered counterfeit purchase. A sample of 180 respondents was selected to participate in the survey. The study employed a survey questionnaire approach adopting the research instrument by Matos et al. (2007) to determine whether price-quality inference, perceived risk, integrity and personal gratification were predictors of purchasing and owning counterfeit goods. Data analysis utilized factor analysis to generate counterfeit purchase determinants. Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the influence of these determinants on counterfeit purchase.

Table 1.0: Literature Review on Predictors of Counterfeit Purchase in Malaysia

<b>Title of Study</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Predictors of Counterfeit Purchase</b>
Purchase Intention towards Counterfeiting Luxuries Fashion Product among Undergraduate Student in UniKL	Krishnan et al. (2017)	Brand image, social influence, price-quality inferences, Integrity, novelty seeking, status consumption
Purchase intention of Malaysian undergraduate students in regards to counterfeit luxury goods and its relationship with materialistic and ethical values.	Ong et al. (2013)	Ethics and materialism
Behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty: Malaysian's intention on counterfeit clothing and footwear	Ng and Choy (2012)	Attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty
Why customers do not buy counterfeit luxury brands? understanding the effects of personality, perceived quality and attitude on unwillingness to purchase	Harun et al. (2012)	Novelty seeking
Exploring critical factors choice of piracy products: An empirical investigation on Malaysian customers'	Haque et al. (2011)	Social influence, personality, pricing and the economy

Unraveling perceptions on counterfeit goods insights from the Malaysian mindset	Yeap and Thurasamy (2006)	Risk, morality and implicit impressions
Counterfeit music CDs: Social and personality influences, demographics, attitudes and purchase intention: Some insights from Malaysia	Thurasamy et al. (2003)	Gender, integrity, normative susceptibility, personal income

## V. Findings

### a. Demographic Profile of Respondents

From the demographic profile in Table 2.0, among the 180 questionnaires distributed to consumers at Kampung Baru are those who had bought pirated goods in the last three months. The response rate for the survey was 83.3% with 150 usable questionnaires. As the location of this study was located at Kampong Baru, the respondents were Malays, mainly males (53.3%) and aged between 20-30 years old (62.7%) and 31-40 years old (28.0%). Most of them were qualified workers with degree (42.0%) and in the income ranges of RM2001-RM3000 (36.0%) and RM1501-RM2000 (26.0%).

Table 2.0 Demographic Profile of Sample Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	(%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	80	53.3
Female	70	46.7
Total	150	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
20-30	94	62.7
31-40	42	28.0
41 and Above	14	9.3
Total	150	100.0
<b>Education Level</b>		
SPM	24	16.0
Diploma	45	30.0
Bachelor/Degree	63	42.0
Master and Above	18	12.0
Total	150	100.0
<b>Level Of Income</b>		
RM 700-RM 1500	27	18.0
RM 1501-RM 2000	39	26.0
RM 2001-RM 3000	54	36.0
RM 3001 and Above	30	20.0
Total	150	100.0

On their recent purchase pattern as users of counterfeit goods, they were highly aware and fully conscious of their counterfeit purchase. They knew about pirated products from friends and family (49.3%) followed by news from newspaper/internet/magazine (30.7%), from social sites like Facebook or Twitter (14.7%) and from government campaigns (5.3%). The common types of pirated products bought are luxury goods (38.7%) mainly handbags like Gucci and Coach for females and Armani Exchange shirt and Louis Vuitton bags for males. They also bought pirated software and games (32%). 21.3% had bought pirated sportswear while 6% bought counterfeit cigarettes.

b. Factor Analysis of Consumer Attitude towards Counterfeit Goods

Factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation was performed on the variables. From the factor analysis results as indicated in Table 3.0, a unidimensional consumer attitude towards counterfeit goods as the dependent variable with high reliability score of 0.94 was obtained. Respondents indicated they love shopping for counterfeit goods (.93), they felt nothing wrong with purchasing counterfeit goods (.92) and prefer pirated goods because of the affordable price compared to the genuine ones (.89). Buying counterfeit goods generally benefits them (.87).

Subsequently 19 items from the independent variables namely price-quality inference, perceived risk, integrity and personal gratification were subjected to factor analysis to derive the factor structure in order to explain the predictors of consumer attitude towards counterfeit purchase. Items with cross loadings and factor loadings below 0.40 were deleted. Analysis derived a 5-factor structure. Three variables identified as price-quality inference, integrity and perceived risk were generated. Analysis on the original single personal gratification factor showed distinguished characteristics towards purchase of counterfeit goods among Malaysian users hence this factor was separated into two new factors and subsequently renamed as status recognition and sense of accomplishment. All variables generated acceptable Cronbach Alpha reliability scores from 0.83 to 0.95.

The demand for counterfeit goods measures the ability and willingness of users to purchase counterfeit goods. Results found that users had a strong preference for counterfeit goods due to price differential and perceived product benefits. It was also conceived that the purchase of pirated goods was not illicit, both from legal and moral perspective. The first factor generated was price-quality inference which describes rational behavior of consumers who are willing to pay a bit more to get the best product and positive price-quality perception. Factor 2 accounted for personal integrity of respondents who exhibited characteristics of honesty, responsibility, polite and good self-control. However when posed with the question "Purchasing pirated/counterfeit goods is not a crime as long as I buy them from registered shop", respondents agreed that purchase of counterfeit goods is not a crime as shop is a legal entity. This is counterproductive in the efforts by government to influence demand for counterfeit goods and to change the mindset of buyers.

Table 3.0: Analysis on Consumer Attitude towards Counterfeit Goods

Factor	Items	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Factor Score
Independent Variable: Factor 1 Price-Quality Inference	Generally speaking, the higher the price of a product, the higher the quality will be	4.20	0.97	0.87
	The price of a product is a good indicator of its quality	4.03	0.97	0.85
	You always have to pay a bit more for the best product	4.33	0.78	0.90
	For me, higher price means higher quality	4.10	0.98	0.82
	Higher quality goods are a better choice for me	4.38	0.8	0.75
	Cronbach Alpha	.90		
Factor 2 Integrity	I consider honesty as an important quality for one's character	4.66	0.66	0.87
	It is very important that people be polite	4.72	0.56	0.90
	I admire responsible people	4.79	0.47	0.56
	I like people that have self-control	4.67	0.66	0.70
	Purchasing pirated/counterfeit goods is not a crime as long as I buy them from registered shop	4.46	0.95	0.46
	Cronbach Alpha	.83		

Factor 3 Perceived Risk	The risk that I take when I buy a pirated/counterfeit product is high	3.39	0.81	0.84
	There is high probability that pirated/counterfeit product doesn't function well	3.45	0.8	0.87
	Spending money to buy pirated/counterfeit product is a bad decision	3.32	0.78	0.76
	Purchasing pirated/counterfeit goods will put me at risk of dissatisfaction	3.31	0.73	0.76
	Cronbach Alpha	.85		
Factor 4 Status- seeking	I value social recognition	4.69	0.66	0.74
	I value pleasure	4.70	0.61	0.72
	Product with renowned/famous brands is very important for me	4.47	0.93	0.56
	Cronbach Alpha	.81		
Factor 5 Accomplish ment	I always attempt to have a sense of accomplishment	4.67	0.64	0.85
	An exciting life is important to me	4.69	0.65	0.88
	Cronbach Alpha	.95		
Dependent Variable –  Demand for Counterfeit Purchase	I prefer pirate goods because the price is affordable	4.51	0.9	0.89
	There's nothing wrong with purchasing pirated market goods	4.37	1.01	0.92
	Generally speaking, buying pirated/counterfeit market goods is a better choice	4.33	1.01	0.92
	I like shopping for pirated/counterfeit market goods	4.29	1.08	0.93
	Buying pirated/counterfeit market goods generally benefits the consumer	4.27	1.04	0.87
	Cronbach Alpha	.94		

Perceived risk as factor 3 revealed users who are aware there is a high probability that counterfeit products do not work well (.87), followed by risk that respondents bear when buying counterfeit goods (.84). Purchasing counterfeits could put them in the risk of dissatisfaction. They even agreed that spending money to buy counterfeit goods is a bad decision (.76). Two new factors were generated from original personal gratification factor. It was then renamed as status recognition and sense of accomplishment. Status recognition as factor 4 indicated social recognition (.74), value the pleasure (.72), importance of famous brand (.56) when purchasing counterfeit goods. Factor 5 was sense of accomplishment (.88) which indicated behavior of exciting life and constant attempt to have a sense of accomplishment (.85) when involved in purchasing counterfeit goods.

#### c. Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4.0 presents the multiple regression results. Findings on the relationship between price/quality inference, perceived risk, integrity, status and accomplishment with attitude for counterfeit goods produced  $R^2 = .338$ ,  $F = 4.73$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ . This means that 33.8% of the independent variables are explained by attitude towards counterfeit purchase. Three significant variables were obtained namely perceived risk ( $\beta = -0.23$ ,  $t = -3.69$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ); followed by integrity ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $t = 2.54$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) and status ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $t = 2.3$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). However price ( $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $t = 0.56$ ,  $p = 0.58$ ) and sense of accomplishment ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $t = 0.28$ ,  $p = 0.78$ ) were found to be not significant predictors of counterfeit purchase.

Table 4.0 Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Independent Variable	F/sig	Standardised Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value (t)	Significance (p)
Price Quality	14.73	0.04	0.56	0.58
Perceived Risk		-0.23	-3.69	0.001**
Integrity		0.23	2.54	0.01**
Status Recognition		0.23	2.3	0.02**
Sense of Accomplishment		0.24	0.28	0.78

Dependent Variable = consumer attitude towards counterfeit goods

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.388

\*\*Significance level,  $p \leq 0.05$

## VI. Discussion and Implications

Findings revealed factors that drive consumer attitude towards purchase of counterfeit goods among Malaysians are reflected in the demand side for such goods. The issues of demand side for counterfeit goods stem basically due to consumer behavior. Findings of this study corroborate previous studies by Norum & Cuno (2011) and Vida (2007) which indicated consumer attitudes towards piracy are an important factor affecting the willingness to purchase counterfeit goods. It can be deduced that Malaysian consumers are fully aware of the perceived risks involved when engaging in counterfeit purchase as well as the integrity and status recognition that influence this form of negative purchase. Results are similar to another past study by Perez et al., (2010) which identify consumers who purchase counterfeit goods especially the fake luxury brands tend to optimize their resources by getting the lower price; having fun as an experiencing adventure, enjoyment, and risk and even fooling others expecting not to be caught. They perceive themselves as “savvy” individuals.

Similarly social status was found to have positive relationship to counterfeit purchase of luxury brands while integrity was not significant (Haseeb & Mukhtar, 2016). In terms of integrity, it was acceptable that purchasing pirated and counterfeit goods is not a crime as long as I buy them from shops. Findings were contrary to another study by Rahpeima et al. (2014) which found integrity has a negative significant effect. Past study by Chiu & Ho (2016) on purchase intention on counterfeit sporting goods found that consumers who have a positive attitude toward the purchase of counterfeit sporting goods, tend to have friends who accept the use and purchase of counterfeit sporting goods. They perceive that they have control over the purchase of counterfeit sporting goods and hence are more likely to indicate an intention to purchase counterfeit sporting goods. Recent study by Hennigs et al., (2015) have explored further into psychological antecedents such as variety seeking, personal integrity, moral judgement and risk aversion in counterfeit perception and counterfeit shopping behavior tend to differ across countries. Findings in this study found status consumption and integrity significantly influenced counterfeit purchase, This could be a trait common among Malaysians as supported by another recent study by Krishnan et al. (2017).

Findings had implications on the demand-side counter measures on counterfeit purchases. Although the Malaysian government has implemented supply side measures, however, as long as demand for counterfeit products continue to flourish, supply will never ceased either. Findings in this study found subjective factors related to personal gratification traits namely integrity and status recognition influenced the demand for counterfeit products. Hence countermeasures should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of counterfeit factors and the drivers and enablers of counterfeit demand.

Most companies of distinguished brands consciously choose to say nothing about the widespread and growing counterfeiting of all kinds of goods. The industry must be held accountable for keeping the public safe from counterfeits. Companies can either be proactive. Admitting that the brand has anti-counterfeiting problem is one way of revealing the depth and breadth of counterfeiting and creating public consciousness. Companies can publicize their anti-counterfeiting measures on their company website. The public will start to realize that counterfeiting is a widespread problem by getting more information about the breadth and depth of counterfeiting. There is dire need to focus on changing the mindset of consumers by driving the message across to them that counterfeiting is not a victimless crime. The public should realize that they can be the victim especially in counterfeit medication. Campaigns on consumer education need to go beyond awareness,

communication and information on risks but more on emotional closeness to the customer him/herself. The arguments used in such campaigns need to have more emotional closeness to the customer.

Trademark holders and companies can capitalize on education stressing on the benefits of the original product and explain the damaging effects of counterfeiting not only on the original manufacturer but on the society as a whole. For example, the problem of child labor potentially associated with counterfeiting would prevent them from buying or wearing fake brands could act as a deterrent to consumers who fear for their image as fashion conscious individual. So probably the effects on the labor market or on consumer safety as well as the damage on their public perception would be more suitable in this context.

Emotional counter measures include changing consumer mindsets about the acceptability of counterfeit by making clear to consumers that counterfeit purchase is a crime that is stealing. Consumers have to be clear that their purchase is directly or indirectly supporting a criminal organization to the disadvantage of their country and the rest of the world. Consumers might not think that buying a fake handbag or software piracy could hurt anybody but the money trail for counterfeit products might be funding serious criminal activity or terrorist groups in another country. In summary, Malaysians have to be conscious about protecting brands against counterfeiters and counterfeit imports as the grey market is a genuine threat to the retail economy which is an important sector of growth for the Malaysian economy.

## VII. Limitation and Future Research

The study may have limitations in terms of the small sample size and sampling procedure. Although it was purposively sampled, however samples were located from one specific area. Hence future study should engage with larger samples from different consumer perceptions across different countries. Only several factors were examined hence future research can delve other related areas such as ethical consumption of counterfeit purchase. Emotional and psychological antecedents that directly influence demand for counterfeit goods notably on the integrity and ethical dimensions could be further explored. Counterfeit purchase via online websites which has become increasingly rampant but difficult to detect could also be explored in future research.

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