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ANALYSING ATTITUDE AS A DETERMINANT OF COUNTERFEIT CONSUMPTION AMONG THE MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

Counterfeiting, which encompasses the production, importation, exportation, distribution, and sale of counterfeit consumer goods that are intentionally designed and branded to resemble authentic products, is essentially a form of theft. It poses a major problem on a global scale as it can severely impact legitimate businesses by reducing sales, profits, brand trust, and overall value. The key factor influencing unethical behaviour, such as purchasing counterfeit goods, is individuals' attitudes, which hold true regardless of the specific product category. The decision to engage in counterfeiting activities depends on whether individuals hold positive or negative attitudes towards such behaviour. While previous studies have examined various factors related to the demand for counterfeits, there has been limited research exploring the emotional aspects of consumer behaviour. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how attitudes influence counterfeit consumption. A quantitative approach was adopted to gather primary data, employing an online questionnaire survey completed by 363 public sector employees who participated in the study. The findings demonstrate a significant correlation between attitudes and counterfeit consumption. This research will contribute to the existing literature on counterfeit consumption, particularly in terms of understanding the impact of attitudes on consumer behaviour. Furthermore, the findings will provide valuable insights to policymakers, regulators, and industry stakeholders, aiding combatting counterfeiting.

Keywords: counterfeiting, attitude, counterfeit products

1. INTRODUCTION

On the 25th of September 2015, world leaders at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in New York formally endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda), promising to cooperate to promote more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development. It is a strategy that promotes prosperity, the environment, and people which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), that are meant to address the most pressing economic, social, and environmental issues facing the entire world. In order to achieve the SDGs, one strategy is to expand international trade. Trade has a track record of increasing income-generating capacity and enabling poverty reductions that were previously unheard of. Cross-border trade has significantly increased over the past few decades, supporting the rise in living standards around the world. Illegal trade, which includes counterfeiting, poses a serious threat to the SDGs because it displaces legitimate economic activity and causes irreparable harm to ecosystems and people's lives.

Counterfeit trade costs society in terms of employment, crime, and social services. In addition, it also contributes to financial losses, causing legitimate manufacturers to experience intangible losses, a decline in goodwill, and damage to the equity and reputation of the genuine brand (Ting et al., 2016). It is also regarded as an economic problem as unfair competition from imitation goods puts a company's future

investments in R&D and revenue at risk.

The emergence of counterfeit markets is largely a result of consumer demand. As consumers become more aware of the differences between counterfeit and real goods, their attitudes and behaviours become crucial components in the counterfeit market's existence. According to some academics, if people did not buy counterfeits, there would not be any counterfeiting (Fejes, 2016). Counterfeit consumption satisfies consumers' utility needs and hedonic wants, such as pleasure, fun, and excitement (Rosely et al., 2019). Counterfeiting is a significant global trade issue in many nations, including Malaysia (Ting et al., 2016). The growth of e-commerce has given a big impact to the retail industry by providing business to the new opportunity for expansion and resulted customer to enjoy greater convenience and product choices. For example, the e-commerce live stream platform can enhance the sharing and communication methods between enterprises and others viewers, improve consumers' sense of social presence and positively influence their purchase decisions and behaviours (Ming et al., 2021). Specifically, in the internet traditional e-commerce shopping experiment, Wang (2021) found that social presence can effectively promote the generation of traditional e-commerce shopping behaviour. Zafar et al. (2021) found that browsing website can effectively generate consumers' awareness and thus promote consumers' impulsive consumption intention. Hence, counterfeit sellers can easily make profits through various e-commerce such as Shopee, Lazada, and Tokopedia as well as on social media sites like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Due to the anonymity provided by the internet, criminals looking to make money from product counterfeiting now have a more effective platform to work through (Wilson & Kinghorn, 2016).

Consumers consume counterfeits for various reasons. A significant price advantage over genuine counterparts is the main factor driving the purchase (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2018). Given the current climate of uncertainty and fear especially in a Post Covid-19 world, consumers are unable to spend more due to their higher costs. Unemployment and loss of earnings caused by the pandemic had reduced purchasing power of the consumers and subsequently may increase demand for cheaper products, including counterfeits. Consumers play a crucial role in the counterfeit trade, and willing consumer participation is evident worldwide, especially in developing countries (Kala & Chaubey, 2017). The studies on counterfeiting's demand side had previously examined consumer purchasing intentions, the propensity to purchase, and attitudes toward counterfeit products, which result in positive or negative behaviour (Kenawy, 2014). Penz and Stöttinger (2005) also found that consumer-related drivers have a higher impact on counterfeit consumption than supplier-related drivers, and consumer traits have long been thought to be significant determinants of counterfeit consumption (Fejes, 2016).

In Malaysia, supply-side interventions like economic countermeasures, i.e., the law governing intellectual property and border control enforcement, are common. However, efforts to influence demand by emphasising consumers' emotion and mindset are still lacking (Malik et al., 2020). Understanding the attitude of consumers towards counterfeit products is vital because it influences their behavior and decision-making. By investigating into consumers' attitudes, researchers can identify the underlying reasons behind their choices, such as purchasing counterfeit products, and design targeted strategies to address these motivations. Empirical research on attitude that could affect counterfeit consumption in Malaysia is scarce. Thus, it is important to better understand the attitude factor of counterfeit consumption among Malaysians particularly the public sector employees. Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine whether there is a connection between public sector consumer attitudes and counterfeit consumption.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Counterfeit Consumption

The rise in counterfeit product consumption is one aspect of the counterfeiting phenomenon, which has become increasingly complex and aggressive. They mentioned that consumer demand for counterfeits is a significant factor in their existence (Malik et al., 2020). Rosely et al. (2019) in his study further added consumer demand as the primary driver of counterfeit market development had posed difficulties in preventing consumer involvement in counterfeiting activities. As consumers' desire to acquire counterfeit

products grows, it is more important than ever to understand how and why they are driven and have favourable opinions toward doing so.

The counterfeit products acquired by consumers is more often than not appear similar to genuine articles (Teo & Mohd Yusof, 2021). In Malaysia, counterfeiters target a wide range of goods, from high-street beauty products that can cause skin allergies to automotive spare parts. More importantly, food is also being faked, either by being labelled with a specific brand that did not come from that manufacturer or, more insidiously, the food's content may not be what it is claimed to be. In addition, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, falsified medicines are among the most dangerous of these counterfeit products, with an increasing amount being produced and sold in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia. Counterfeit medicines are frequently sold in Malaysia in unregulated outlets such as roadside stalls, traditional medicinal halls, and provision shops scattered across the country, from cities to villages. According to Fejes (2016), demand for counterfeits partially drives its manufacture and trade. Many people do not view purchasing and selling counterfeit products or brands as serious crimes compared to other more serious illegal acts (Kassim et al., 2021).

The growing demand for counterfeit goods has resulted in a new consumer behaviour phenomenon (Rosely et al., 2019). Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences around the world. Many countries have implemented lockdowns and limited people's mobility to halt the spread of this infectious virus (Polas et al., 2022). In Malaysia, the pandemic has caused consumer and business income to fall, increasing the demand for counterfeit or smuggled goods due to their cheaper price point.

Attitude of counterfeit consumers

According to most research, counterfeit consumers are a homogeneous group who will buy or avoid counterfeit products. The decision to buy counterfeit goods is greatly influenced by their attitude towards them (Penz & Stottinger, 2005). Consumers are more likely to buy counterfeit goods if they have a positive attitude toward them. Contrarily, a negative consumer attitude toward counterfeits reduces the likelihood of purchasing counterfeits regardless of the product type (Kassim et al., 2021).

According to Quoquab et al. (2017), consumers with a more positive attitude toward counterfeits will have a higher behavioural intention to buy such goods. Additionally, Fejes (2016) pointed out in his research that people are more likely to adopt unfavourable attitudes toward a product category they have negative beliefs on. Similarly, Penz and Stottinger (2005) noted that there are significant differences between consumer attitudes towards genuine and counterfeit goods. Some people choose to purchase genuine goods because of the symbolic meanings they represent, such as luxury. Others are enticed to buy a counterfeit good at a price much lower than its genuine counterpart by the promise of gaining false prestige (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Along with theoretical justifications, there is also empirical data available. Bian and Mautinho (2009) and Phau et al. (2009) are a few examples of studies that have shown that consumer attitudes towards counterfeits act as a moderator between social, personal, and product-related variables and consumer's intention to consume counterfeit products. It is also critical to note, as Penz and Stöttinger (2005) pointed out, that attitudes toward a behaviour (i.e., counterfeiting) are a better predictor of behaviour than attitudes toward counterfeit items (Fejes, 2016).

Consumers who favour counterfeits and conduct business with their producers often use biased excuses. Consumers release themselves from liability by defending their actions and placing the blame on the manufacturers (Penz & Stottinger, 2005). These situational ethics promote increased counterfeit purchasing, which benefits illegal producers. Because illegal producers have lower profit margins than original manufacturers, the buyers' justification for their actions is that they do not feel "ripped off" (Penz & Stottinger, 2005). Additionally, according to Phau et al., (2009), consumers who want the excitement, status, and image that come with owning such goods but cannot afford the genuine article can fulfil their dreams thanks to the illegal producers.

The objective of this research is to analyse attitude as a determinant of counterfeit consumption among Malaysian public sector employees. According to Huang et al. (2004), attitude is a learned propensity to react favourably or unfavourably to a situation. The attitude construct is often used as a predictor of consumer intentions and behaviours (Phau et al., 2009). Thus, the following hypothesis was developed to execute the objective.

H1: Attitude is associated with counterfeit consumption among consumers from the Malaysian public sector.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research method was utilized in this research as quantitative methods quantify empirical data. This research employed the online survey technique to gather data from respondents regarding their perception on attitude and counterfeit consumption. The self-administered questionnaire consists of three sections. Section A consists of questions on respondents' profile, while section B and Section C measures the attitude and counterfeit consumption, respectively. The questionnaire was adapted and adopted from Ting et al.'s (2016) previous survey. The questionnaire's constructs were quantified using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The 'snowball' technique was employed in this study. It is a non-probability sampling type with a pattern similar to a pyramid system, where only the early sample participants are selected. They are then tasked with recruiting additional sample participants until the desired sample size is reached, as in the previous method. This technique was accomplished in this research using online tools which allowed sample members to recruit others in their network. The population for this research consisted of consumers from the public sector in Malaysia due to the belief that they uphold the principle of lawfulness. Lawfulness refers to the moral guidelines, expectations, and values that shape their decisions and actions when purchasing, selecting, using, and selling goods and services. According to the data from www.mydata.gov.my, this population was 1,258,088 as of 2021. A total of 363 responses, representing a 94.53% response rate based on the expected 384 sample size suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for a population of more than 1 million units.

At an earlier stage, a pilot study was carried out randomly to 30 staff members of the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (MDTCA) in Selangor before moving on to an investigation with a significantly larger number of participants. The objective of the pilot study was to ensure that the constructs were clear, identify any potential weaknesses, and collect feedback from respondents on the questionnaire. The pilot study was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items are consistently based on Cronbach's Alpha value. The results of the reliability test indicate the Cronbach Alpha coefficient size is 0.804 (between 0.7 and 0.8), thus the strength of association between measures are considered as good.

The relationship between attitude and counterfeit consumption were analysed using correlation. Correlation analysis would assist in understanding the strength of the relationship between two continuous variables which could be positive or negative. Prior to testing the correlations, preliminary analyses were performed to ensure that no assumptions of normative, linearity, or homoscedasticity were violated. The normally distributed data served as the basis for deciding which instrument to use. In this research, the correlation between attitude and counterfeit consumption was investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A total of 363 respondents comprised of civil servants responded to the online survey. Table 1 summarizes the profiles of the respondents, i.e., age, gender and race.

Table 1. **Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables**

Variable	Item	N=363	%
Gender	Male	174	47.9
	Female	189	52.1
Age	< 30 years old	29	8.0
	30 < 35 years old	69	19.0
	35 < 40 years old	138	38.0
	> 40 years old	127	35.0
Race	Malay	329	90.6
	Indian	12	3.3
	Chinese	7	1.9

Descriptive statistics were used to investigate the attitudes of consumers in the Malaysian public sector toward the purchase of counterfeit goods. The overall mean response to each question is 2.83. On a scale where 1 denotes 'strongly disagree' and 2 denotes 'disagree' respectively, the mean indicates that the respondents are leaning toward disapproval of the consumption of counterfeit goods. The overall standard deviation is 0.91, indicating that the responses are close to the mean value and are almost similar as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. **Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Attitude (ATT)**

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
1) Considering the price, I prefer counterfeit goods.	3.43	1.12
2) I like shopping for counterfeit of goods.	3.33	0.84
3) Buying counterfeit goods generally benefits the consumer.	2.90	0.86
4) There's nothing wrong with purchasing counterfeit goods.	3.39	0.94
5) Buying counterfeit goods is a better choice.	2.28	0.99
6) I will continue to use counterfeit goods even though I knew many parties will be affected by it.	1.64	0.70
Overall	2.83	0.91

The following table (Table 3) presents the results of the correlation analysis between attitude and counterfeit consumption.

Table 3. **Pearson Correlation Analysis between Attitude (ATT) and Counterfeit Consumption (CC)**

	Attitude (ATT)	Counterfeit Consumption (CC)
Attitude (ATT)	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.707**
	N	363

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between attitude and counterfeit consumption of Malaysian public sector consumers was investigated, as shown in Table 3. Based on the analysis performed, there was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables, as $r = 0.707$ ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, the counterfeit consumption of consumers from the Malaysian public sector is strongly associated with their attitude. The finding suggests that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that attitude has positive significant effect on the consumption among the public sector workers.

Discussions

The objective of this research was to investigate whether the attitude of consumers from the Malaysian public sector would affect their behaviour toward counterfeit consumption. This research found that the attitude and counterfeiting is associated. The positive value from the correlation test indicated that the consumers are leaning toward disapproval of the consumption of counterfeit goods. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Ajzen (1985) suggested that an individual's attitude would influence his behaviour. The same theory was adopted in this research to examine whether the attitude of the consumers from the Malaysian public sector would affect their behaviour toward counterfeit consumption. The results of the analyses demonstrated that attitude is inversely related to counterfeit consumption among consumers from the Malaysian public sector. The outcome of this research is consistent with Tang et al. (2014), which suggested that personality and subjective traits are powerful indicators of attitudes toward counterfeit consumption. Fejes (2016) reported studies that have revealed various aspects of a counterfeit product's attitude and how these attitudes influence counterfeit consumption. Some findings, for example, suggest that attitudes vary greatly not only across the globe but also within countries. In addition, evidence from Toklu and Baran (2017) also disclosed that consumer behaviour does not follow a certain pattern in counterfeit consumption, and behaviour can be changed by education on the detrimental effects of the products (Toklu & Baran, 2017).

Overall, even though some consumers from the Malaysian public sector have been using counterfeit products in the past, the responses received in this research indicate that they prefer not to continue consuming counterfeits despite accessibility to these goods being easy and the cost of counterfeit consumption being lower than the authentic products. Furthermore, these consumers also believe that purchasing and using counterfeit goods would not be a better choice as it would cause more harm than benefits. From the findings, the author suggested that attitude towards lawfulness considerably influenced counterfeit consumption. According to Raz (2009), the concept of lawfulness attitude stems from early studies that the characteristics of law are to uphold and enforce contracts, agreements, rules, and customs of private persons and associations. Laws were thought to be capable of increasing or decreasing various activities, whether as a deterrent or enforcement (Lum, 2019). The present study raises the possibility that the attitude of consumers from the Malaysian public sector was bound with the lawfulness attitude they hold as a civil servant and their responsibility to the government to uphold the law.

5. CONCLUSION

This research attempted to understand the effect of attitude on counterfeit consumption among consumers from the Malaysian public sector. The finding of this research would provide a better view of the consumer behaviour in regards to their personality factors. In view of the above, it is recommended that more activities and awareness programmes be designed for the society about the effect of counterfeit consumption. These programmes will directly help create awareness in the society about the consequences of purchasing counterfeit products. Consumers need to be educated on making rational and sustainable choices as a way of empowerment so that they may recognise their own problems and become prudent in making decisions. In this research, the result showed a significant relationship between the attitude of consumers toward counterfeit consumption.

Counterfeit products are an important global issue because counterfeiting is part of illicit trade that is not only a threat to the global economy but also a social threat. In Malaysia, counterfeit products are in abundance and have gained a stable market. The ease of acquiring counterfeit products have increased its acceptance and encouraged repeat consumption. In relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) introduced by the United Nations (UN), counterfeiting as part of illicit trade is known to present a significant deterrence to all seventeen of the SDGs that holds back progress, increases costs, and pushes achievement of its goals further away. Notably, policymakers and the authorities need to be more stringent on those selling counterfeit products and those who purchase them because it impacts not only the

economy but also consumer safety due to their inferior quality.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The sample used in this research were limited to respondents exclusively from the public sector. Consequently, the findings may not be applicable to a broader population. To improve the generalizability of future studies, it is advised to include participants from various employment categories, including the private sector and self-employed individuals. Exploring these diverse groups may reveal differences in work-related factors and other variables, enabling meaningful comparisons and facilitating further in-depth analysis. In addition, this study used a questionnaire to gather information from the respondents. Future research may consider the adoption interviews to gather as much information as possible regarding their attitude towards counterfeit consumption.

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