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# Vietnamese Attitudes and Behavioural Patterns towards Counterfeit Brands

*Giang Huynh\* and Dr Jonathan A.J. Wilson\*\**

This study examines Vietnamese female consumers' attitudes towards counterfeit branded products; by investigating the influence of brand image, product involvement and price advantage towards decision-making processes associated with purchasing and ownership. An inductive anti-positivist approach was adopted, employing qualitative methods; drawing from in-depth interviews distilled and synthesized using Word Cloud software, as Geographic Information System (GIS) based Spatial Analyses. Findings suggest that Price Advantage plays a determining and predominant role in encouraging consumers' purchase intention of a counterfeit product. In addition, Brand Image has positive effect on the purchase intention as well; while product involvement plays no significant role in the process. Further observations point to there being paucity of literature that focuses on Vietnamese and ASEAN markets. With this in mind, a new conceptual framework was developed to reflect the nuances of the Vietnamese consumer experience; which it is suggested will be of value to scholars, practitioners and further studies.

**Keywords:** branding, counterfeit brands, fake brands, Vietnam, consumer behaviour, brand image, purchase intention, price, ASEAN

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sikap dari konsumen wanita Vietnam terhadap produk merek tiruan dengan menginvestigasi pengaruh dari citra merek, keterlibatan produk, serta keuntungan dari harga terhadap proses pengambilan keputusan yang terkait dengan pembelian dan kepemilikan. Dengan mengadopsi pendekatan anti-positivis induktif menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam yang kemudian diolah menggunakan perangkat lunak Word Cloud sebagai Geographic Information System (GIS) berlandaskan Spatial Analyses. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa adanya keuntungan dari harga memiliki peranan penentu dan dominan yang mendorong niat konsumen untuk membeli produk tiruan. Selain itu, citra merek memiliki pengaruh yang positif pada niat membeli produk tiruan; sementara keterlibatan produk tidak berperan dalam proses pengambilan keputusan. Hasil pengamatan lebih lanjut menunjukkan masih ada kekurangan literatur yang fokus pada pasar Vietnam dan ASEAN. Melalui penelitian ini, kerangka konseptual baru dikembangkan untuk merefleksikan pengalaman dari konsumen Vietnam yang dapat bermanfaat bagi kaum terpelajar, praktisi dan juga untuk penelitian selanjutnya.

**Kata Kunci:** merek, merek tiruan, merek palsu, Vietnam, perilaku konsumen, citra merek, niat membeli, ASEAN

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## Introduction

Counterfeiting is said to have had its growth since the 1970s (Phau, Sequeira and Dix, 2009A) when Levi's discovered a large quantity of fake jeans carrying their trademark logo in South East Asia (Phau, Sequeira and Dix, 2009A). Aware of the economic damage that the growing counterfeit trading may bring, research continues to be carried out to identify

the motivation for consumers to consume counterfeit products; mainly in big markets such as China, USA, UK and Australia. However, there have been a few papers that look into Vietnamese market, regardless the fact that this country is ranked fifty-third globally in terms of the

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counterfeit market size and is flagged as being an emerging market to watch (Cheng, Fu and Le, 2011; Wilson, 2014).

There have been complicated and contradictory facts reporting on Vietnamese markets regarding the consumption of luxury goods and counterfeit products. Figures have shown that the GDP in Vietnam has doubled between 2003 and 2009. Along with that come the changes in income distribution. In 1999, Vietnam was still a country with a minority of affluent households. In 2011, it has grown to be a country with an emerging strong middle class, at least in major urban areas (Miani and Merola, 2012). This increase in household income has led to the demand of premium products, since young people in urban cities have become more fashionable and trendy (Euromonitor International, 2011). However, according to recent market research conducted by Nielsen in Vietnam, 47 percent of the cosmetics and beauty care products on sale in Hanoi is unauthentic and will be of great harm to consumers. Vietnamese consumers now accept the fact that luxury products in the market are counterfeits. Being a geographical neighbour to China, a homeland of counterfeiting in many ways, it is not difficult for counterfeit products to be imported to Vietnam and distributed under perceived authentic brand names.

Within these recent years, international luxury brands have penetrated Vietnamese markets and opened official stores. The long history of counterfeit consumption has made Vietnam a challenging market for luxury brands.

This inductive research aims to provide a better understanding of Vietnamese female consumers' attitudes towards counterfeit branded products (CBP) by investigating the influence of brand image, product involvement and price advantage to the decision making process of purchasing a counterfeit branded product.

## Literature Review

Counterfeiting has become a global economic phenomenon considering the demand for counterfeits of branded products. This makes the study of why consumers choose to purchase counterfeits more worthwhile than ever before (Bian and Moutinho, 2011B).

This literature review explores how counterfeits have been defined and perceived, summarise the general motivations that have been considered to have impact on how consumers make their purchase decision of a CBP; which include brand image, product involvement and price. Figure 1 is a summary of the academic articles selected as a result of a systematic literature search and desk review:

### What is a counterfeit branded product?

Counterfeits are illegal reproductions of a trademark brand, which are similar or identical to the originals, including packaging and labelling (Phau and Teah, 2009; Wilcox, Kim and Sen, 2008). In other words, counterfeits are those bearing features that cannot be distinguished from a registered trademark belonging to another party (Bian and Moutinho, 2011B). Back in 1988, Grossman and Shapiro have identified two different types of counterfeiting: deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeits. With deceptive counterfeits or blur counterfeits, often occur to automotive parts, consumer electronic products, pharmaceuticals and so on; consumers cannot observe the quality of the goods that they purchase, nor can they distinguish copies from authentic merchandise; therefore they cannot be held accountable for this behaviour (Grossman and Shapiro, 1988; Bian and Moutinho, 2011B). As for non-deceptive counterfeits, consumers know and intentionally purchase the fake products. This form of counterfeiting is the main focus of this research since non-deceptive counterfeits are common in luxury brand markets, from brand-name watches, leather goods, fashion apparel, perfumes to cosmetics. Given that the global sales of counterfeit products stand at \$US300 billion and counterfeits account for eight per cent of world trade (Bian and Veloutsou, 2007); one would suspect that many buyers are not fooled. The study under the non-deceptive context is important as under these circumstances might consumers' perceptions of counterfeits reflect their demand for such products. (Grossman and Shapiro, 1998; Wilcox, Kim and Sen, 2008; Bian and Moutinho, 2011B)

Since the appearance of what we call "fake" luxury products, manufacturers have found this

Table 1. Taxonomy of key articles

Author(s)	Year	Title	Key points
1 Grossman and Shapiro	1988	Foreign counterfeits of status goods	Originally defines between the two markets of counterfeits: deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeits.
2 Peter H. Bloch, Ronald F. Bush, Leland Campbell	1993	Consumer accomplices in product counterfeiting	Discuss from demand and supply side, proposing price plays important roles when consumer decide
3 Cheok, K.H., Tan, S.J. and Wee C.H.	1995	"Non-price determinants of intention to purchase counterfeit goods: An exploratory study"	Discuss attitudes, brand status, materialism and six product attributes. Explain why using non-price factors when researching counterfeits motivation
4 Plummer, J.T.	2000	How personality makes a difference	Suggest three ways of looking at one brand's image -Brand characteristics - Product attributes - Perceived consequences/benefits
5 Nia, A. Zaichkowsky, J.L.	2000	Do counterfeits devalue the ownership of luxury brands?	Discuss symbolism and different views on CBP
6 Kim, H.M., Sen, S. and Wilcox, K	2008	Why do Consumers Buy Counterfeit Luxury Brands?	Discuss changes in quality of CBPs. Suggest several counterfeit purchase decision types with different driving motivations. Focus on attitudes serving social adjustive and value expressive, using examples from brand conspicuousness and advertising copy.
7 Bian, X. and Moutinho, L.	2009	An investigation of determinants of counterfeit purchase consideration	Propose three determinants: brand image, product knowledge and product involvement. Discuss functional luxury brands and fashionable luxury brands. Conclude that brand personality is the most influential factor.
8 Phau, I., Sequeira, M. and Dix, S.	2009A	Consumers' willingness to knowingly purchase counterfeit products	Discuss status consumption, materialism and integrity affect attitudes. Product attributes affect the knowingly willingness to buy. Supposing that the benefits associated with the original and counterfeits are the same, customers are likely to knowingly purchase CBP.
9 Phau, I., Sequeira, M. and Dix, S.	2009B	To buy or not to buy a "counterfeit" Ralph Lauren polo shirt: The role of lawfulness and legality toward purchasing counterfeits	Use TRA and theory of moral reasoning to form the attitudes towards CBP. Factors influencing attitudes are materialism, status consumption, integrity and legality. Results: people with low incomes and high integrity are likely to purchase CBP but not exclusively. People who see money as honest and polite have negative attitudes toward CBP.
10 Phau, I. and Teah, M.	2009	Devil wears (counterfeit) Prada: a study of antecedents and outcomes of attitude towards counterfeits of luxury brands	Define counterfeits and discuss previous research regarding attitudes towards counterfeits. Test in Asian market using collectivism, social and personal factors affecting attitudes towards CBPs plus taking value conscious consumers and status consumption into consideration.
11 Bian, X. and Moutinho, L.	2011A	"Counterfeits and branded products: effects of counterfeit ownership"	CBP users evaluate BP as positively as non-CBP users. Non-CBP users don't evaluate CBP as positively. There may not be a loss of sales to BP. CBP purchase intention is predominantly determined by perceived CBP brand personality. Perceived financial risk of CBP has no impact on CBP purchase intention. Perceived social risk of CBP has significant impact on CPB purchase intention.
12 Bian, X. and Moutinho, L.	2011B	The role of brand image, product involvement, and knowledge in explaining consumer purchase behaviour of counterfeits	CBP prone consumers are seeking positive brand personality associated with BP→Brand personality plays dominant role in brand image. CBP and BP are bought under high product involvement situation but for different usage. High disposability and low price make customers purchase. Knowledgeable customers are less CBP prone.

market a fertile investment regardless of the fact that counterfeiting is seen as a serious economic, social, and political problem (Bian and Moutinho, 2011A). This opens various views about the manufacturing, the ownership and purchase of a CBP.

From the manufacturer point of view, a counterfeiter claimed that none of his customers think that his products are real (Stipp, 1996

cited in Nia and Zaichkowsky, 2000). Customers buy his fake products because they cannot afford the authentic ones while the counterfeits come at lower price and almost as good as the originals. Basically, the counterfeiters are '*making consumers' dream come true by providing a fake Chanel with much lower price than an original*' (Nia and Zaichkowsky, 2000).

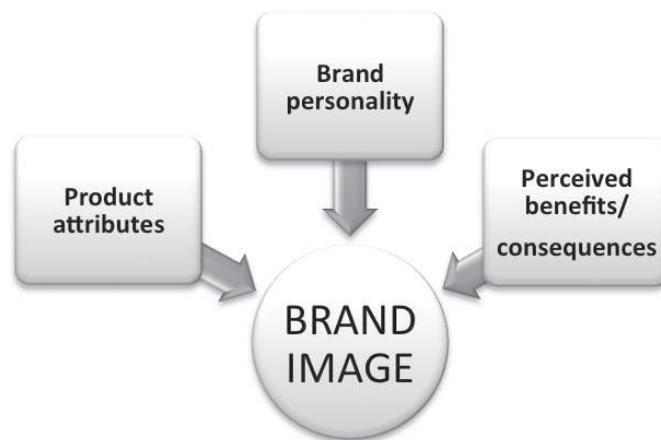


Figure 1. Brand image components. Adapted from Plummer, 2000

With the rapid expansion of the counterfeit industry, questions have been made to explore whether the existence of counterfeits has devalued the authentic luxury products. Nia and Zaichkowsky (2000) have concluded that luxury brand owners found it fun and worth the price that they paid for the luxury products, whether or not they are original or counterfeit. In their research, respondents were people who own luxury brands, both original and counterfeits. Those who purchased the authentic products see the counterfeits to be inferior and they appreciate the prestigious ownership of the original products. On the other hand, people with counterfeits are more open-minded and they do not mind if their products are seen to be inferior. Overall, for luxury brands owners, the invasion of the counterfeits doesn't make them worried about the decrease in the status, value or satisfaction of possessing the original luxury products (Nia and Zaichkowsky, 2000).

For that reason, *what is a counterfeit of a branded product in Vietnamese consumers' perspective? (Q1)*

### Brand image

The objective of investing in brand development is to create an identity around which products come to be recognised and valued by customers (Bian and Moutinho, 2009). A simple definition of brand image according to Aaker (2010) is how a brand is perceived by consumers. Perception has always been the most significant in effective communicating; therefore perceived brand image is indeed the consumers' perceptions of a brand (Bian and Moutinho,

2011A). In his published article in 2000, Plummer stated that a brand presents itself to the world in many ways and the world interprets the brand through many different filters, too. Any brand, according to him, can be described in terms of three classes of characteristics: physical attributes; brand personalities and perceived consequences of using the brand. These are the three components to a brand image, three aspects of a brand's description (Plummer, 2000).

### Product attributes

Product attributes are those descriptive features that characterise a product or service (Keller, Aperia and Georgson, 2008) and can be categorised in a variety of ways; they are independently verifiable and play a significant role in decision-making process. An individual can see for him or herself exactly what the characteristics of the brand may be (Plummer, 2000). Research has indicated that the more positive the consumers' perceptions of the product attributes of a specific brand are, the more chance there is of the branded product (BP) being purchased (Bian and Moutinho, 2011B). However, a counterfeit cannot exist without high brand value products, because the product attributes are copied from the original product, carry only a few distinctive features (Turunen and Laaksonen, 2011). Grossman and Shapiro (1988) considered counterfeits are of much lower quality than the authentic goods they imitate while Turunen and Laaksonen (2011) stated that counterfeits are imitated products of low quality and low price and that those are a common sight on the street. In counterfeits, the functionality and aesthetic reasons are vital as the quality expect-

tations are a common concern. Consumers perceive counterfeit and authentic products to be on different levels and possess different qualities, especially in product attributes. One of the main attributes that consumers consider while purchasing luxury products is authenticity. This attribute is perceived as a self-evident characteristic of original products while it is regarded as the most important factor to distinguish luxury from counterfeit. (Turunen and Laaksonen, 2011). Therefore, *to what extent do product attributes influence consumers' purchase intention of a CBP? (Q2)*

### **Brand personality**

Aaker (2010) defined a brand personality as the set of human characteristics associated with a given brand. A brand personality factor enables a consumer to express his or her own self. It is the result of communications and serves as a symbolic function and helps consumers to differ from or to integrate themselves with others (Plummer, 2000; Bian and Moutinho, 2009; 2011B). Branded products are often purchased based not only on functional attributes but also for symbolic reasons (Bian and Moutinho, 2011A). Nowadays, prestige and symbolism have become an essential role in consumers' mind when purchasing any fashion-related products. Given the fact that fashion products do not last for long, fashion changes and people need to stay in trend, most consumers now hesitate to spend a fortune on some bag that will stay in Vogue for a month and soon will fade out of trend. Symbolic brands are often used as an expression of an individual's self-concept and need for social conformity (Phau, Sequeira and Dix, 2009A). The consumption of a luxury product becomes meaning-based when the product is used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity. Luxury items contain emotional value and consumers perceive a product to be exquisite, it gives the product a personal meanings. Thus, self-identity and self-image can be confirmed through a luxury product's symbolic meanings (Turunen and Laaksonen, 2011).

Product attributes often affect the brand personality and the brand personality can also reinforce and represent an attribute (Aaker,

2010). Previous research suggests that favourable brand personalities are a central driver of consumer preference and usage as consumers are prone to associate themselves with a desired group or ideal self-image (Aaker, 2010; Bian and Moutinho, 2011B). It hasn't been confirmed whether or not the brand personality of an original brand, in this case luxury brand, can be transferred to a counterfeit. However, as symbolic attributes are captured by brand name; and consider a CBP is simply not a product but more importantly a brand – a counterfeit one that bears a brand name of an original branded product, it is rational to assume that once CBPs are perceived to possess positive and favourable brand personalities they are more likely to be purchased (Bian and Moutinho, 2011B). Thus, *how powerful is brand personality when consumers decide to purchase a CBP? (Q3)*

### **Perceived benefits/consequences**

According to Plummer (2000), the benefits/consequences of using a brand are in some cases external functions and in other cases have internal effects on the head of the person using the product. In other words, the perceived benefits/consequences are what consumers think the product can do for/to them (Bian and Moutinho, 2011B). Regarding to a CBP, it is often the benefits that consumers believe the products will bring as benefits are what consumers seek while purchasing a product/a brand. These benefits lead to certain end states or values that consumers wish to achieve (Bian and Moutinho, 2011B). There are two types of benefits: functional and emotional benefits. Given the fact that luxury branded products give the consumers a positive feeling, the purchase of a CBP can be offering consumers with emotional benefits (Aaker, 2010). Past studies suggest a positive relationship between perceived benefit and consumer decision making; hence *how influential are consumers' perceived benefits to the purchase intention of a CBP? (Q4)*

### **Product involvement**

Like many marketing concepts, product involvement is derived from the discipline of psychology. Involvement is one of the four

advertising models introduced by Pelsmacker, Geuens and Van den Bergh (2010), which is used to elicit emotional response. Product involvement is commonly defined in marketing as a consumer's enduring perceptions of the importance of the product category based on the consumer's inherent needs, values and interests (Bian and Moutinho, 2011B). Pelsmacker, Geuens and Van den Bergh (2010, p.87) defined involvement as *the importance people attach to a product or a buying decision, the extent to which one has to think it over and the level of perceived risk associated with an inadequate brand choice*. Product involvement has been an instrumental framework, vital to understand consumer decision-making behaviour and associated communications (Fill, 2009).

Research suggests that when product involvement is high, consumers have more motivation to devote cognitive effort to evaluating the merits of a product as buyer decision processes are thought to proceed through extended decision making, a series of sequential stages involving information search and evaluation of criteria (Bian and Moutinho, 2009; 2011B). Given that branded products are high involvement, consumers are likely to pay a great deal of effort to process information, distinguish between a branded product and a counterfeit one and consumers might develop different perceptions of a counterfeit branded products (CBP) and a branded product (BP). Consumers look for more personal, experiential and symbolic gain with high involvement products. That means once CBPs don't match the expectations desired by consumers, they stand a less chance to be purchased. Hence, ***to what level can product involvement impact consumers' purchase intention of a CBP? (Q5)***

### **Price advantage**

It has been claimed that 'Price is unquestionably one of the most important marketplace cues' by Lichtenstein et al. in 1993 (cited in Wee, Ta and Cheok, 1995) so price is a significant factor to consider when discussing the motivation of purchasing a counterfeit.

There are certain past papers which do not take price into consideration such as a paper in 1995 by Wee, Ta and Cheok. According to the

authors, it is obvious that consumers purchase counterfeits because they are cheaper version of the branded originals. Wee, Ta and Cheok decided to look beyond the price factor since they acknowledged Dickson and Sawyer's words, 'shoppers are very heterogeneous in terms of their attention and reaction to price and price promotions' (cited in Wee, Ta and Cheok, 1995). They also suggested that price is not an issue since most of the counterfeits are often the reproductions of luxury goods which command high premiums nonetheless.

On the other side, de Matos et al. (2007) have found out a close relationship between the price factor and the purchase intention of a counterfeit. They specified the two main differences consumers perceive between a counterfeit and an original product are the lower prices and the poorer guarantees. Price difference is an important variable when choosing a counterfeit. Bloch, Bush, and Campbell (1993) also found consumers will select a counterfeit over an authentic product when there is a price advantage. Ang et al. (2001) concluded that the more value-conscious one is; the more favourable is one's attitude towards counterfeits. Most purchasers of authentic luxury brands pursue value for brand, prestige and image benefits, but maybe unwilling to pay an extremely high price for it. For a lower price and a slightly substandard quality, counterfeits are in favour as they still provide the same functional benefits as the originals. Saying that, again, value-conscious consumers are more prone to purchasing a counterfeit (Phau and Teah, 2009). At the end of the day, price is still the main moderator of attitudes towards counterfeit purchasing intention (Penz and Stottinger, 2005). Therefore, ***how important is price in consumers' decision making to purchase a CBP? (Q6)***

### **Conceptual framework**

Study on consumers' behaviour and attitude towards counterfeit products has been taken place for a long period of time with different approaches and distinctive results. This paper has taken the diversity in counterfeiting literature into consideration and has selected the most significant determinants to the decision making and purchase intention of a counterfeit product.

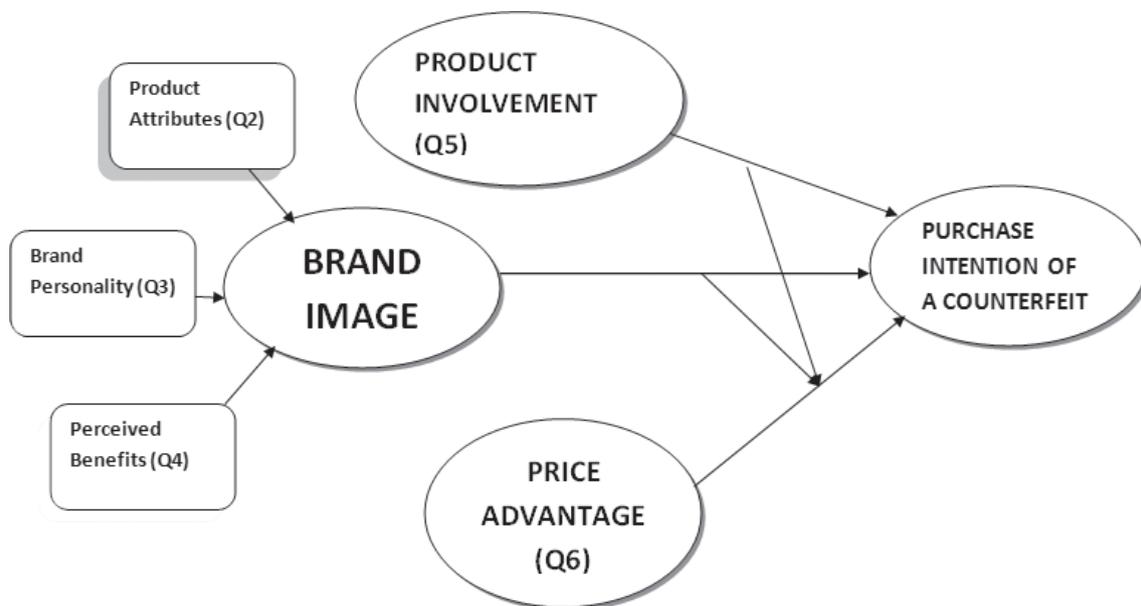


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

Research has indicated different determinants leading to the purchase intention of a counterfeit product; one of those important factors is always price. Authors such as Bloch et al. (1993), Ang et al. (2001) and Phau and Teah (2009) consider price advantage to be significantly influential. Some other authors such as Bian and Moutinho (2009, 2011); Phau, Sequeira and Dix (2009A, 2009B), Wee, Ta and Cheok (1995) all agreed that there is more to the price advantage that motivates consumers to purchase and consume CBPs considering that counterfeit products are reproduction of branded goods which already commands luxury consumption. However, Miani and Merola have revealed interesting results in their research about Vietnamese consumers in 2012. While half of Vietnamese respondents feel positive towards foreign brands (Italian brands in this case) and associate foreign and luxury brands to have good image, prestige and quality; 91 percent of them do not recall a recent purchase of an authentic (Italian) brand while only 13 percent intend to make a purchase in the near future. Nearly 60 percent of respondents would not buy authentic (Italian) brands if they have an option of cheaper alternative Vietnamese brands. This behavioural gap shows that to Vietnamese consumers, price still largely contributes to a purchase decision. As a result, price advantage is still considered to be one of the three main determinants during the decision making process of a CBP purchase.

Using findings from the literature review, this study develops six research questions and investigates according to the framework presented below. This framework shows the three main factors that are suggested to lead to the purchase intention of a counterfeit product: brand image, product involvement and price advantage. Taking brand image as the main factor, the framework identifies three components so as to explore further into the motivation of purchasing CBPs. In addition, price advantage is proposed to be the determining element - after consumers have developed brand image and product involvement - to the decision making process.

Using the conceptual map above, these are the six research questions proposed for this study:

1. What is a counterfeit of a branded product (CBP) in Vietnamese consumers' perspective?
2. To what extent do product attributes influence consumers' purchase intention of a CBP?
3. How powerful is brand personality when consumers decide to purchase a CBP?
4. How influential are consumers' perceived benefits to the purchase intention of a CBP?
5. To what level can product involvement impact consumers' purchase intention of a CBP?
6. How important is price in consumers' decision making to purchase a CBP?

## Methods

Participants were selected based on purposive sampling, which involved choosing people whose views were believed or judged to be relevant to the topic. Purposive sampling is also proved to be most suitable for small sample size research (Jankowicz, 2005; 2000; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). The sample for this study consisted of eight Vietnamese females, who were carefully interviewed and selected based upon their familiarity with the concepts of luxury brands and counterfeit of branded products.

### Sample criteria

These are the sample criteria used in the judgement process to select the final respondents. All participants needed to:

- Be Vietnamese females, living in either Hanoi for over five years.
- Be over 18 and under 35.
- Be familiar with the concepts of luxury products, especially fashion and beauty products.
- Be familiar or experienced with the concept of counterfeiting.
- Be aware of the existence of the counterfeit branded products.

The young generation in Vietnam forms the largest and most important consumer group, thanks to the higher living standards in urban cities. The Vietnam Beauty and Personal Care reports in 2010 and 2011 have regarded young urban citizens as more fashionable and trend-conscious. This derives from the long-standing perception of “foreign brands are better than domestic ones”, the rise of Internet, and the higher frequency of ‘for-leisure’ international trips. These three reasons result in a young generation who are self-image conscious and understand then prefer foreign premium brands. (Euromonitor International, 2010; 2014)

Among these young citizens, women pay attention to their fashion and beauty choices and usually mix match their trends and styles. Men on the other hand do not change their fashion choices that often (Euromonitor International, 2014). This research therefore only selects young women as the sample to increase the reliability of data collected.

## Procedure for primary data collection

The method chosen for data collection was in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews were applied aiming to describe consumers’ real-life experience with counterfeit and authentic branded products, in order to interpret the attitudes. (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In-depth interviews are the most common technique among exploratory researches (Wisker, 2008). The first reason is that the personal contacts of the interviewer and the interviewees can enhance the quality of the data. The participants did not feel pressured for nervous talking to strangers about somewhat personal feelings (their own ideas of counterfeiting and their shopping preferences). More importantly, counterfeiting is indeed an interesting topic, and participants felt more excited and eager to do an interview on that topic rather than to complete a questionnaire (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The second reason is the literature. There were various studies done on this topic but on large scale and employed quantitative approach, such as Phau and Teah (2009); Phau, Sequeria and Dix (2009A; 2009B). In 2011, Bian and Moutinho have used mixed research methods in their studies, including focus groups and surveys. Of all academic articles reviewed for this study, there was one by Bian and Moutinho in 2009 that used qualitative approach with focus groups and interviews. The results provided in this research were valuable and in-depth. This in addition to the advantage of close relationships with participants has encouraged this study to employ solely in-depth interviews to produce primary data. The last reason of using in-depth interviews is the results quality. Response bias can affect much to the quality of the data; and it is due to the perceptions of the interviewees about the interviewers (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). However in this case, again with the positive close relationship, the response bias was reduced to a minimum amount that could not affect the outcome of the data.

All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to maintain the authenticity of language and the reliability of data. There were nine interviews with one pilot study to test the feasibility of the interview question. A pilot study is a

small-scale trial before the main investigation, aimed to assess the adequacy of the research design and the research instruments used for data collection (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006: pp.103). The pilot study took place a week before the actual interviews, which left time to adjust the interview questions accordingly. A complete interview question list is provided in the appendix 3 (p.54).

## Data analysis

Data collected from qualitative research are often called unstructured data, which makes the analysis process more challenging and difficult. Unstructured data are not coded in terms of researchers' analytical categories, and can take various shapes and forms (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006). This section of the chapter introduces the process how the primary data were critically analysed.

When the data were first obtained, they were in Vietnamese and in audio recordings. Listening to the audio recording helps to familiarise with the data, while transcribing them into written (word-processed) documents is essential. It is an extremely time consuming process with the possible threats of misunderstanding and misinterpreting respondents; however the transcription does not only facilitate further analysis but also to establish a permanent written record of the discussions (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009; Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007). As mentioned above, all of the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. As a result, the transcribing process was in Vietnamese too in order to preserve the authenticity of language and meaning.

This paper also followed an inductively based analytical procedure to analyse primary data with the data display and analysis approach, suggested in Miles and Huberman (1994). The next stage of this procedure is data reduction, which includes summarising and simplifying data to transform and condense it (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Among a plethora of methods to reduce data, this research selected 'word clouding'. Data after being transcribed were grouped and categorised into questions and respondents. For each interview questions being answered, the transcript

then was put into online software called Wordle (available at [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net)) to generate word clouds. In these 'clouds', key words and trends were identified since they appeared to be of bigger font size than others. The key words were then translated into English, ready for analysis. The reason for doing this is still to maintain the originality of the language of participants and to minimise the threats of misinterpretation.

The use of Word Cloud software, as Geographic Information System (GIS) based Spatial Analyses, integrated within various methodological approaches is something that is being included in more and more websites and graphics in television news pieces (Cidell, 2010). It offers a quick and useful way to data mine and synthesise large amounts of text, in order to yield key and significant themes within one image. This meta-language approach to analysing data, achieved through blending network analysis and semiotic analysis produces network measures using qualitative data, to arrive at indicators such as knowledge domains, modality, paradigms and paradigm shifts (Süerdem, 2009; Wilson, 2011). Within the field of Geography, GIS is an established method of analysing data. Its usage to date has been used typically in the study of human geography, education, sociology, and media.

The method will be used for data analysis is content analysis, which is *a systematic coding and categorising approach which can be used to explore large amount of textual information* (Grbich, 2009). Data after being transcribed appropriately categorised, key words were analysed basing on the conceptual framework and literature review; thus relationships among certain factors exposed. Common patterns and results were used then to draw conclusions and recommendations of the research. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003) Finally, the data were presented with discussion in order to answer the research questions and objectives.

## Results & Discussion

### Result

Here, interview questions are referred to as A1, B4; and respondents named R1 to R8. Twelve word clouds in Vietnamese were gener-



Figure 3. Examples of word in Vietnamese generated by clouds

ated to analyse key words and patterns; the following being an example of one of them.

### 1. Luxury brands and counterfeits of luxury brands

Section A of question list intended to identify the knowledge of respondents about **brands** in general. 100 percent of respondents were confident to give definitions of a famous brand and a luxury brands with examples. Six out of eight mentioned quality in their definition of a luxury brand with good/great/exceptionally high/best quality evaluation. R3 emphasised on the physical and mental value that a luxury brand can bring along with the importance of brand history and heritage. Two brought up the limited edition of luxury goods, stating luxury brands aim at a small segment of the population and are not massively produced. All of them agreed that luxury brands are all expensive. As for their favourite luxury brands, all stated were in fashion/shoes/accessories section. Chanel was the most favourite with five answers; however three misspelled as ‘Channel’. Other favourites were Salvatore Ferragamo (SF), Louis Vuitton (LV), Gucci and Prada. Half of respondents answered ‘Apple’ as a luxury brand and indeed one of them said ‘Zara’.

Section B guided participants to **the concepts of counterfeiting and CBPs**. 100 percent participants knew about the existence of counterfeits; some mentioned that counterfeits

were a normal phenomenon and are popular among Vietnamese consumers. Question B2 asked participants about their own definition of a CBP. All eight responses mentioned the low/bad quality of the products, cheaper prices, imitation of originals. R3 was more specific when she suggested different versions of counterfeits, namely Fake 1, Fake 2, etc. There were some interesting insights stating CBPs were mass productions with ambiguous distributors – R2 or country of origin of CBP:

*“They are all made in China!”* – R8, 24, teacher.

Question B3 saw seven of eight participants have purchased counterfeits. They were aware that the products were unauthentic and all products were fashion items of their favourite luxury brands: Gucci, Chanel, SF and LV.

Question B4 concluded the first part with asking for **their perception of using and owning CBPs**. There are three trends in their reactions. There were R3 and R4 who were absolutely against CBPs, thinking CBPs devalued original products. R3 thought using CBP equalled an extremely immoral act:

*“After reading and knowing more about my favourite luxury brand, I think using counterfeits simply means killing the authentic brands, the history and heritage of a lifetime work!!!”*

R3, 23, marketing assistant, said with strong body language.

R4 seemed to be more patronising and expressed as she said *“if you have the money, you buy authentic brands. If you do not, don't buy them at all!”* This objection of using CBP trend can be summarised with:

*“Regardless of how similar or identical a CBP can look, it is still a counterfeit and never will be the same as the originals”.*

R3, 23, marketing assistant.

On the other hand, three respondents showed neutral attitudes towards counterfeits. R1, 2 and 5 answered with both for and against argument. They agreed that CBPs are wrong and illegal, but considering the financial status and the acceptable quality that CBPs provide, they believe CBPs satisfy the desire of using luxury brands at a reasonable price.

*“Indeed there is no punishment for using counterfeits; maybe only for manufacturing them. CBPs do no harm to you, are cheaper and almost as good so why not using them?”*

R5, 22, accountant.

R6, 7, 8 all supported the use of CBPs, saying they were fairly affordable, providing “quite okay” quality and using them was *“absolutely normal in society now!”* (R6)

## 2. Factors affecting counterfeit purchase decisions

Section C provided answers for main findings of this paper, i.e. **exploring the influence of three factors to the decision making process**. C1 raised questions about **brand image** influence, such as brand awareness, product attributes and brand personality. The answers seemed similar since all of respondents felt more confident, comfortable, elegant, classy, fashionable, sophisticated, graceful and lady-like with the fashion brands. The brands were described with a cluster of adjectives such as luxurious, high quality, classic, simple, unique, suitable and glamorous. R3 in addition felt the brand (SF) helped to express her own identity and helped her *“be confident to conquer the world”*. She was the only who has deep understanding of her favourite brand with rec-

ognisable logo, unique features of the brand. In general, they all know the basic feature of their favourite brands. For perceived benefits and consequences in question C1-5, all identify the use of a BP to be fashionable, luxurious, and similar as mentioned above. The only risk might occur was the financial threats from over-spending on luxury brands. The last question in section C1 summarised how brand image influenced their purchase decision of a CBP. There were two tendencies: (1) brand image positively encouraged CBPs purchases and (2) brand image negatively encouraged CBPs purchases. Half of participants would buy CBPs under the influence of brand image (R1, 5, 6, 7) because they thought it was normal, reasonable and acceptable. R6 claimed her counterfeit Prada bag to be of *“lovely quality, nice design and affordable price”*. On the other hand, R2, 3, 4, 8 disagreed with the positive influence of brand image; although they agreed brand image had certain impact.

*“Positive brand image to a brand will enhance the knowledge and awareness of that brand, so hopefully consumers won't buy the counterfeits anymore!”*

R2, 27, banker.

Both R3 and 5 fancied authentic SF shoes and Prada bags and would love to use authentic products but claimed their financial status wasn't enough to support such purchase. R3 confirmed she would never buy CBPs of her favourite brand regardless while R5 thought a fake Prada bag at the moment for her wouldn't be any harmful.

Questions in C2 led to **the effect of product involvement** to the purchase decision. Speaking of time and effort spent when purchasing a luxury product, R 2, 7, 8 would only look at their favourite luxury brands and would only purchase from there; while the rest would consult peers, professionals and spend more time to look around. At the end of section C2, half of respondents revealed they would only purchase authentic products of the brands they admire; while three of the rest confessed they would prefer CBPs since they were more affordable and the product life cycle was short (for fashion items). R4 did not provide any clear opinion

because she thought as long as the items looked nice on her; she would buy regardless of luxury brands/authentic or counterfeit products.

The last part of the interviews concentrated on the impact of price on the purchase. Overall, six out of eight respondents would choose to buy counterfeits because they were cheaper, more affordable while satisfying the desire of owning luxury.

*“I would choose CBPs because let’s face it, it looks like an authentic branded item and nobody would know the origin of the product besides me!”*

R8, 24, teacher.

R3, 4 confirmed their opinions when saying they would never buy CBPs even when the products were way cheaper. R3 didn’t like it if she was caught using/wearing CBPs while R4’s philosophy was “never to buy counterfeits. They are fake!”

## Discussion

This section is structured according to the research questions.

### 1. Definition of counterfeit branded products in Vietnamese consumers’ perceptions

By giving definitions and examples of famous and luxury brands, participants have shown the basic knowledge about branding in order to be qualified for this research. 100 percent participants were aware of the existence of counterfeits; some even considered this phenomenon to be ordinary:

*“Of course there are counterfeits of luxury brands. As consumers, we all know about it!”*

R6, 25, online shop owner

Their definitions of a counterfeit branded product were quite similar; all perceived low quality to be the first element to recognise a counterfeit, followed by price. Some responses mentioned the identical or similar use of logo, design and packaging. At this point, there was little attitude being exposed since they all had

the same idea about what a counterfeit looked like. This result concurs with most of the definition in the literature review, from Teah and Phau (2009) and Wilcox, Kim and Sen (2008). However, respondent 3 and 8 provided extra information regarding the classification of counterfeits:

*“Actually there are different versions of counterfeit now. The so-called super-fake1 products are really nice, have decent quality and look almost exactly like the authentic. If you are not an expert in luxury goods, you can’t really tell the different.”*

R8, 24, teacher.

*“There is a plethora of counterfeits on the market now; such as fake 1 or fake 2, fake 3, etc. For cheaper forms such as fake 2, 3; it is easy to tell by the poor quality and design delicacy. Fake 1 is the most expensive among the counterfeits because they are very close to the originals, and they are not that much cheaper than the authentic ones! However, regardless of fake 1, 2 or fake 0.5; they are still all fraud!”*

R3, 23, marketing assistant.

The additional information from R3 and R8 seem to contradict Turunen and Laaksonen (2011) perception of counterfeits when they think these imitations are of low quality and low price. On top of that, the majority of respondents showed mixed attitudes towards buying and owning CBPs.

For that reason, with the first research question, ***Vietnamese consumers’ definition of a CBP is an imitation of a luxury branded items regarding design, logo and packaging; with different versions possessing different quality and price. However, the quality and price are still worse than the original product.***

### 2. The impact of brand image on attitudes to buy CBPs

Three factors of Plummer (2000) brand image theory are combined and discussed in this section. This is due to the similarity in respondents’ answers.

As all participants were females, they dreamed of luxury brands to fulfil their desire,

to help them be more confident; therefore respondents perceived their favourite brands to have the same personality. The respondents provided different favourite fashion brands but described those using same words. The repetition of those descriptive adjectives expresses the same goal in fashion sense that these Vietnamese young females wanted to achieve; or what they want the brand to represent. Only two respondents were able to tell the recognizable features of their preferred luxury brands, which can be assumed that Vietnamese consumers though familiar with luxury brands, do not have thoroughly understanding of the unique product attributes and the distinctive brand personality that the brands have. This fact also showed the *limited understanding of luxury brands and their social and emotional value*. However, the *results did prove luxury brands are desired because of their symbolic aspects rather than functional*; in correspondence with Bian and Moutinho (2011A). Only R3 mentioned wearing SF helped to express her identity, which provided the same findings as Turunen and Laaksonen (2011): **luxury consumption can be meaning-based to confirm individual's identity.**

The majority of respondents believed luxury brands could fulfil their emotional needs by providing them emotional benefits such as being graceful, luxurious, etc. This once again confirms Aaker's argument in 2010 that *the perceived benefits with luxury brands are often emotional rather than functional*.

The results have identified two tendencies in the influence of brand image on this group of consumers. The relationship between positive brand image and likelihood to make the purchase of a CBP corresponds with Bian and Moutinho (2009); Phau, Sequeira and Dix (2009A) findings. However, with consumers like R3 who understands the concept and value of luxury brands; R4 whose financial status is stable; and R2 and R8 who are value-conscious; they disagreed to purchase CBPs even under the impact of brand image. The reasons they provided include R8's "*even if I buy, I will use it up or wear it out in a short amount of time and only for certain occasions*" which are in harmonise with , and Moutinho's findings in 2011B, when they claimed that *the decision*

*to purchase largely depends on the context of usage.*

### 3. The role of product involvement in deciding the purchase intention

The responses received in product involvement part are diverse and cannot generate an overall conclusion. Their hesitation and awkwardness during their answers can be explained by the lack of understanding of the concept 'product involvement'. Although they were introduced with terminology at the beginning of the interview, their answers revealed no integrity and connection. Despite of that fact, the results still exposed some personal emotions and relationships towards luxury brands (R2, 7, 8). In general, respondents did not show any close connection between product involvement and their purchase intention of a CBP. This indicates Bian and Moutinho(2011B) conclusion to be precise as they stated *product involvement has neither direct nor indirect effects on consumer purchase intention of CBPs.*

### 4. The importance of price advantage in the decision making process.

Results for this question are the most significant finding in this research. As explained in the literature review about the importance of price to consumers' decision making process among Vietnamese consumers, this study has *identified the essential and determining role of price when consumers intend to make a purchase.* Opposite to Bian and Moutinho (2009, 2011); Phau, Sequeira and Dix (2009A, 2009B), Wee, Ta and Cheok (1995) who all agreed that price isn't important and does not motivate consumers to purchase and consume CBPs, six out of eight respondents for this study would choose price as an important determinant. The above authors believed CBPs are imitations of premium luxury products which are expensive anyway; but *it actually is because of the costly premium authentic goods that encourage Vietnamese consumers to switch to CBPs.* The responses of 'more affordable price', 'very nice quality and design', 'exactly similar to originals' also proved the discovery from Bloch et al. (1993), Ang et al. (2001) and Phau and Teah

(2009) to be accurate among Vietnamese consumers.

## Conclusions

Counterfeiting has become a global economic phenomenon considering the demand for counterfeits of branded products. This makes the study of why consumers choose to purchase counterfeits more worthwhile than ever before (Bian and Moutinho, 2011B).

This study examines Vietnamese female consumers' attitudes towards counterfeit branded products; by investigating the influence of brand image, product involvement and price advantage towards decision-making processes associated with purchasing and ownership. A particular focus was given to luxury brands; due to the increased significance, resonance, involvement and pull of such branded commodities.

Findings suggest that Price Advantage plays a determining and predominant role in encouraging consumers' purchase intention of a counterfeit product. In addition, Brand Image has positive effect on the purchase intention as well; while product involvement is not considered during the process.

For the first two factors of brand image and product involvement, Vietnamese consumers have shown similar attitudes with what have been academically tested. However, this investigation has provided an important conclusion, which is the determining role of price to a purchase intention of a CBP among Vietnamese female consumers.

There are some interesting discoveries that previous academic papers failed to address. One challenge the authors encountered was the lack in understandings of luxury brands. Vietnam is a developing country; hence consumers have just been introduced to luxury brands and luxury branded consumption relatively recently. Nonetheless, Vietnamese consumers have put together fascinating insights that are unique and in-depth. They have shown the tendency to become wise consumers; searching for ways to satisfy their needs and wants without over-

spending the budget. They understand the significance of symbolism and prestige in fashion; they desire to define their identity with high value products. Conversely, they also recognise the short product life cycle of fashion. This is perhaps one additional explanation why Vietnamese young consumers would prefer counterfeits to originals.

It can be settled that Vietnamese consumers understand the meaning of counterfeits and have experienced counterfeits regardless of whether or not having purchased one. Overall, most participants have shown positive and supportive perceptions of counterfeits. Despite their awareness of legal issue, they did not think their consumption of counterfeits to be destructive or immoral.

Positive perceived brand image of luxury goods can inspire consumers to make a purchase of a counterfeit; however it also will depend on the usage situation. Vietnamese consumers consider product attributes and brand personality to be closely related to satisfy their expectation in one luxury brand; thus to express their personal identity. The benefits they perceive the luxuriousness to bring are mainly emotional. However, product involvement nonetheless plays no significant role in deciding or encouraging consumers to buy a CBP; partially because Vietnamese consumers are not familiar with the concept of high/low involvement with a product, let alone a luxury brand. Price advantage was proved to be the most attractive feature of a CBP and it was the determining factor that encourages consumers to make the purchase.

The foremost value that this research has provided is the refreshing study about a particular group of Vietnamese consumers. There has been little literature review on the topic of counterfeiting that investigated into Vietnamese market, especially young women. The results of the research have also filled in the behavioural gap in Miani and Merola's study in 2012 about Vietnamese consumers' perception of Italian brands. This contributes to the existing literature about counterfeits of branded products worldwide while focusing on a specific market.

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