

Non-deceptive Counterfeiting of Luxury Goods: A Postmodern Approach to a Postmodern (Mis)behaviour

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Trade in counterfeiting amounts for billions of dollars each year, and yet the buyers of these products are still a mystery. Focusing on the rather unexplored demand-side of the counterfeiting market, this paper presents research proposals explaining the overall process a consumer, subject to group pressure, will experience when facing an opportunity to buy a counterfeited luxury product. We argue that conformity seeking, mimetism and postmodern ethics will act as justifications for the consumers' misbehaviours. Three postmodern qualitative methods are presented as potential tools to investigate the research propositions: observations, deep interviews combined with the ZMET technique & projective techniques.

Counterfeiting is widely considered as one of the big issues firms from various industrial sectors have to deal with (Source: Global Anti-Counterfeit Summit, 2008). Counterfeited products account for a growing fraction of world trade. According to the OECD, counterfeiting would represent 5 to 7% of worldwide trade (200 to 300 billions of Euros) but also leads to a loss of 200 000 jobs across the world (Source: European Commission). 60 countries are known as counterfeiters, with 70% of counterfeited products being manufactured in Asia and 30% in the Mediterranean Area. Two types of counterfeiting do exist: deceptive vs. non-deceptive counterfeiting. When buying a counterfeited product, consumers may or may not be knowing participants in the illegal act of purchase. When the consumer does not know that he is buying a fake, he stands for a victim of counterfeiting. He is engaging in 'deceptive counterfeiting'. This is especially the case for counterfeited medicines (80% of medicines in Africa are believed to be

counterfeited products according the WHO). However, in some other cases, especially with luxury counterfeited products, consumers are willing accomplices: they know at the time of purchase that they are buying a fake. This illegal type of purchase has been labelled 'non-deceptive counterfeiting' and it will be the one we will be focusing on in this paper, for it is in this case that insights on why consumers turn to illegal purchases could be used to develop efficient anti-counterfeit campaigns.

A large panel of luxury products is being counterfeited: perfumes, jewellery, haute-couture, leather goods, accessories, gastronomy, wines and liquors... Counterfeits range from strict copies to sole use of a feature of the brand (usually the logo), including classical imitations. As a French symbol, the luxury industry is characterized by a constant sought of perfection embedded at the same time in tradition and technological innovation. Brand name and value are key in the industry. Therefore, the

spreading of counterfeiting in this field is undoubtedly a real threat to the long-lasting of industrial and craft employment in the sector. Besides, on top of the financial loss inherent to counterfeiting, the counterfeiter is using the notoriety of the counterfeited brand and can severely damage its equity (Source: INPI, 2008). Large luxury brands or conglomerates such as LVMH have set up special entities to tackle the issue of counterfeiting. Still, a lot has to be done to not only better understand the process and fight against it with legal tools, but also to capture the consumers' ways of seeing it and develop more efficient discourses towards them. Academic research can help achieving this.

Scholars in international business have dealt with counterfeiting by investigating anti-counterfeiting strategies (Chaudhry and Walsh, 1996), examining common counterfeiting methods (Harvey & Ronkainen, 1985) and evaluating the economic consequences of international product counterfeiting (Globerman, 1988). As one can notice, those studies deal with the supply side of the equation. As far as the demand side is concerned, some studies have been exploring the various factors leading people to buy counterfeited products. Some of them are consumers' personal characteristics such as age, or income level (Ang et al., 2001), while others deal directly with product attributes such as price or brand (Cordell et al., 1996).

However, few studies have been conducted on consumer misbehaviour in a social setting, at least when purchasing a counterfeited product (Albers-Miller, 1999). By social setting, we mean any kind of group an individual naturally (family) or artificially (friends) belongs or wants to belong to.

This paper aims at filling this gap in the literature, providing research proposals on the various processes leading group pressure to impact on

consumers' intention to purchase a counterfeited luxury product, as well as on the justification of this misbehaviour from the consumer way of seeing it.

In the following sections, we discuss the theoretical background relevant to our development, develop research proposals and propose a methodological approach to further investigate our research question.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Counterfeiting and the Luxury Industry

Before introducing relevant theories related to this research proposal, prior knowledge about the rather scarce already done research dealing with the broad topic this research would fall onto is of great importance.

Quality Value of Counterfeits and the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

Kocher et al. (2007) have been conducting research to enhance knowledge related to evaluations of original products, counterfeits and imitations for luxury products. Their main finding is that, in general, consumers do not have a more positive attitude toward original products than counterfeits. This is a particularly threatening feature of the consumption of counterfeited luxury goods for the luxury industry, for it could imply that the emotional explanation for the purchase of counterfeits (the desire to be part of a group due to a logo) could be enhanced by the rationale explanation (good value for the money). Therefore, social pressure to engage in misbehaviour would be rationalised by economic reasons. Actually, buyers of counterfeits try to legitimate their behaviours and experience reasons for justification, as a proof of applicability of the theory of cognitive dissonance (Eisend & Schubert-Güler, 2006). According to the

theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), dissonance can occur after a decision is made or because intended behaviour contradicts attitudes. In cases of counterfeit, consumers experience it in the form “I bought/will buy a faked product” and “Faked products are of minor quality, illegal, and they do harm consumers, companies and economies as a whole” (Eisend & Schubert-Güler, 2006). In the case of non-deceptive counterfeited products, the awareness of the negative consequences can differ from person to person, and decision to decision. More awareness will lead to higher dissonance and more efforts in applying coping strategies, or it leads to a decreased willingness to purchase counterfeits. In the case of Kocher et al.’s respondents, they displayed the coping strategy through the re-interpretation of dissonant elements by devaluating the non-chosen alternative (“The original luxury brand is almost identical to the fake, but costs a lot more...”).

Consumers’ willingness to buy a counterfeit is usually increasing if they can rate the quality of the product before purchase. If, as this is the case in Kocher et al.’s study, consumers do not value more real luxury goods vs. fakes (especially in terms of quality), they can find pretty easily a rationale to submit to the double social pressure of possessing a luxury-looking good (thanks usually to a logo) and of misbehaving as the others members of the group already did/do.

Towards a typology of non-deceptive counterfeiters

In a more classical, but still highly valuable, way of exploring the counterfeit world of luxuries, research has been conducted, trying to profile consumers of pirated products within the Chinese market (Phau et al., 2001; Teah & Phau, 2007). While Phau et al. focused on pirated brands of clothing, Teah and Phau have tried to examine the influence of social factors on attitude towards counterfeiting in luxury

brands and purchase intention within the Chinese market. Attitude towards ethically debatable consumption behaviour has been proved as a primary factor explaining the act of engaging in such behaviour (Penz & Stöttinger, 2005). Besides, ethical concern can be a factor refraining a consumer from engaging in illicit consumption of counterfeits, especially owing to the culpability feeling which might result (Viot et al.). However, these studies were conducted on a personal basis, without taking into consideration the social pressure our research is investigating. Similarly to past research findings (Eisend & Schuchert-Güller, 2006), Teah and Phau demonstrated that attitudes towards counterfeiting is the driving force that influences purchase intention. “Perceptions of counterfeits” is found to have a positive influence on purchase intentions. This explains why consumers are attracted by counterfeits when counterfeits are of good quality. And admittedly, counterfeits of luxury brands in China are of unbelievable good quality... There are even Grade systems attached to them to segregate the better quality counterfeits from the less superior ones (Gentry et al., 2006).

Both studies’ findings provide useful insights on the topic, although very culturally specific. However, China is of particular interest both for the luxury industry and the study of counterfeiting in general. China has built a reputation as the source of counterfeits. More than 60 per cent of counterfeited products seized by US authorities in 2003 were produced in China (International Chamber of Commerce, 2004) and foreign multinationals estimate that they lose at least 20 per cent of the value of their potential sales to counterfeiters there (Porteous, 2001). For instance, Ralph Lauren has been fighting counterfeited goods since the creation of its Tokyo branch in Asia (1988). They have continually issued warnings to

many stores selling fake 'Polos' in Asia and demanded repressive actions to be conducted. In spite of all these actions, the growth of fakes has not stopped (Wada 1996). Therefore both studies have to be considered as useful tools to better understand this "grey area" of the world.

Quite surprisingly, one issue of Teah & Phau's study is that collectivism does not play a role in affecting consumer attitudes and purchase intention towards counterfeiting of luxury brands. They advance the hypothesis that this is due to their sample's geographical origin (Shanghai), which is advancing into western-style cosmopolitan areas that would have contributed to increased individualism (Li & Su, 2007). In this sense, Chinese consumers of counterfeits could be considered as individualistic as their western counterparts. However, in the frame of our study, which is focusing on social influence, this dimension of collectivism could be further investigated...

Clustering the consumers in a dual typology, Phau et al. (2001) identified low-spenders and high-spenders differing on a number of socio-demographic factors. Low-spenders appeared to be 19 to 24 years old with blue-collar occupation, relatively low monthly income, secondary education level, and no children. On the opposite, high-spenders are 25 to 34 years old with a white-collar occupation, a monthly income of HKD 10,000 - HKD 19,000, tertiary or university education, and children. For both clusters, consumers pay less attention to ethical and legal issues when buying pirated products. This is consistent with the social norm in China which accepts and encourages the purchase of counterfeits (Teah & Phau, 2007). Displaying a counterfeited product is even a "source of face" for some Chinese consumers (Gentry et al., 2006). Therefore, normative influence has positive effects on

consumers (Teah & Phau, 2007). On the opposite, information susceptibility has negative effects on consumers. Information susceptibility is the basis of purchase decision on the expert opinion of others to make informed choices (Ang et al., 2001). If peers or reference group has some knowledge on the differences between originals and counterfeits (such as product quality), and the negative consequences of counterfeiting, consumer attitudes will be unfavourable towards counterfeiting of luxury brands.

Search Process and Non-deceptive Counterfeiting

In discourses on search in marketing and consumer behaviour, consumers are usually assumed to search for brands within a product. Gentry et al. (2001) have investigated this search process within the field of counterfeited luxury goods, and have come to the conclusion that in a counterfeit culture, brands and products are considered as different entities serving different purposes. Actually, counterfeits are said by the respondents to be opportunities to try a low-grade version of the luxury item, with the potential intent to buy the real good in the future. They are seen as acceptable compromises (less value for less cost, at a good trade-off) for products highly susceptible to fads and trends (low life expectancy). But Gentry et al.'s most important contribution to the literature is the finding that consumers do often purchase counterfeits out of conscious choice: they are reaching for a specific brand while looking for a price compromise and that's it. Counterfeits are only good as long as they are counterfeiting a specific brand. Thus, the reason why people buy a counterfeit is because it represents the brand it is supposed to be copying. "A counterfeit appears to offer consumers a chance to separate the brand from the product. While the purchase of a counterfeit represents the consumption of the brand

(brand decision), it does not appear to represent a “product” decision” (Gentry et al., 2001). What remains is the choice of the product within the brand offering, taking into consideration the various offered prices. Therefore, compared to the classical view of search in consumer behaviour, the process appears reversed in the case of counterfeits.

Group pressure and reference group influence

Situational elements may affect illicit behaviour. When considering the act of purchasing a counterfeited product, there are three potential situations: the individual is alone and is free from direct social pressure, the individual is not alone and is subjected to direct social pressure, and the individual is alone and is subjected to indirect social pressure. Indirect social pressure can come from the individual’s belonging or wish to belong to a social group, as well as from socially accepted norms such as laws or codes of behaviour. Direct and indirect social pressure can lead to conform to join others who are/have already been engaging in the illicit behaviour. Albers-Miller (1999) found out that people are most likely to engage in illicit behaviour if there is a peer pressure to do so.

Mimetic Consumption of Non-Deceptive Counterfeits

This group pressure is likely to lead to conformity seeking. This phenomenon of mimetism has been widely researched. According to René Girard, imitation is at the origin of everything, including human condition: the Homo Erectus is a far better imitator than the monkey and this capacity of imitation is what enables him to escape from tribal instincts and lets him progress. “If our desires were not mimetic, they would be forever targeted on predetermined objects, they would be a sort of

instinct. [...]. Without mimetic desires, there would not be any freedom or mankind” (*Je Vois Satan Tomber Comme l’Eclair*, p.35). Desire comes from imitation, whereas need is inborn. If one wants an object, it’s because one has seen somebody else desiring or having it. Desire is “mediatised”. Therefore the logical process for somebody who desires a similar product than a peer, assuming that this product is a counterfeited one, is that the direct/indirect pressure should inevitably engage the consumer in the illegal purchase of a counterfeited good.

This concept of mimetic desire is explained by what Girard labelled the “Romantic Truth”. “Romantic truth” tells us that any individual does not know what he desires. He cannot handle his preferences, which are fluctuating and indeterminate. The Girardian individual is always looking after his identity, his being, and to achieve this goal tries to find in his counterpart the references he does not manage to give himself through a simple act of internal sovereignty.

“What he desires his “being”, a being he feels deprived from and he can see in somebody else. The subject is waiting for this other to tell him what has to be desired, in order to acquire this “being””. (*La Violence et le Sacré*)

Mimetic desire can take the form of two models: “external mediation” and “internal mediation”. When the existing distance between the subject and his model is so large that any interaction is forbidden, except unilateral obedience, mimetic desire takes the form of “external mediation”. Here the situation is pretty similar to the one described by consumer theory, since the subject’s preferences appear as exogenous and fix.

On the opposite, in the case of “internal mediation”, the subject and the model do actually share a common world and interact. This is particularly true in the case of mimetic doubles: each one is a model for the other one. The mutual desires for an object are increasing in intensity as long as each of the subject finds in the stronger and stronger other’s desire a supplementary reason to acquire the object. This leads to a contagious evolution which contaminates the actors: “Mimetic appropriation is contagious and the more polarised on a same object people are, the more the members of the community who are not already implied tend to follow the trend.” (*Des Choses Cachées Depuis la Fondation du Monde*) René Girard labels this as the “process of positive feedback”.

Neo-classical economic theory has also dealt with the mimetic behaviour of consumption, while maintaining the hypothesis of individual sovereignty. If, after having observed individual A, actor B is prone to imitate his behaviour, this is because individual A’s action brings some new information to actor B. There is no change in individual B’s preferences. Put in another way, actor B keeps the same representation of his final wishes, but he has to take into account, when considering which action is the most appropriate, the new information he got from individual A’s action. André Orléan (to be published) labelled this specific type of mimesis as “informational mimesis”. In this case, when two mimetic doubles I and J fight to acquire the same object, one may argue that I sees in J’s relentlessness to possess the object a piece of information which makes him positively reevaluate his estimation of the quality of the desired object.

Reference Group Influence on Non-deceptive Counterfeiters

Actually, mimetic consumption behaviour, as a result of mimetic desire as described above, is often witnessed when consumers seek to belong to what researchers have called their reference group(s). Hyman (1942) was the first one to introduce this concept in a study of social status. He asked respondents with which individuals or groups they compared themselves. Defined more largely, we can define a reference group as a person or group of people that significantly influences an individual behaviour. Within this framework, several types of influences have been identified: information, utilitarian and value-expressive influences. When considering the act of purchasing a counterfeit product of a luxury good, the consumer is actually influenced by utilitarian and value-expressive reference groups. Utilitarian reference group influence can be reflected in attempts to comply with the wishes of others to achieve rewards or avoid punishment (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). When buying a counterfeit, the social norms and codes do act as utilitarian reference group’s features to be respected. Value-expressive reference group influence can be reflected in the acceptance of positions expressed by others due to the need for psychological association with a person or group. This association can take two forms: an attempt to resemble or be like the reference group or a way to express an attachment or liking for the group. When looking for purchasing a counterfeited luxury product, the consumer may want to acquire the apparent status of one reference group (those who actually afford buying the real product) and/or wish to show his feelings for the group gathering those who have already engaged in the more or less regular buying process of purchasing counterfeits. These two associations can actually be widely explained by the new postmodern ethics of the

postmodern consumer, as presented in another part of this paper. However, we can already say, without any reference to the postmodern assumption, that there is strong reference group influence for public-luxury product and brand decisions and negligible influence on private-necessity product and brand decisions (Bourne, 1957; Bearden & Etzel, 1982).

Consumer Misbehaviour in the Social Environment

Not considering the topic of counterfeiting per se, but looking at previous research conducted on consumer misbehaviour in general can provide useful insight to this paper.

Sought for Conformity and Ethical Dilemmas

Research has been conducted to investigate up to which point the sought for conformity impacts the potential misbehaving of an individual, not only in the consumption field, but also in terms of which behaviours are considered as ethically correct or not.

Sought for conformity can occur in two opposite directions at the same time, leading to what is usually called an “ethical dilemma” (Marks & Mayo, 1991). Actually, when being offered to purchase a counterfeited luxury good, the consumer is tied apart between the wish to conform to the socially accepted norm (usually defined by a legal framework) and the wish to conform to what closer groups expect from him in terms of consumption. The consumer finds itself in a complete moral dilemma situation: one of his potential actions may enter in conflict with the actions, interests, values of others (or himself), and “the negative consequences of one action are logically implied in positive consequences of the other action and vice versa” (Villeneuve-Cremer and Eckensberger, 1985, P.180). This ethical dilemma will be solved thanks to the

new postmodern ethics, or at least can be partially explained by them, as presented in the next part of the paper.

Deterrence Theory and Misbehaviour

Deterrence theory has been used to research on consumer fraud (Cole, 1989) and supports the theory of peer-pressure influence on deciding to engage or not in misbehaviour. Actually, as early as 1977 sociologists recognized the need to get more insight and elaborate relevant theories concerning the sources of conformity when studying deterrence (Meier & Johnson, 1977). In particular, two variables affect intentions to participate in illegal behaviour: moral commitment to the legal norm and threat of social disapproval (Cole, 1989). Research has shown that people who perceive less threat of social disapproval are more likely to engage in the behaviour than those who do not.

Attribution Processes of Non-deceptive Counterfeiters

However, group influence from a cognitive perspective comes not so much from a passive submission to group norms/rules but often from complex attribution processes conducted by the consumer trying to understand the causes of the illegal behaviours of group peers. An attribution is any inferential belief that an individual draws from reasoning based on evidence or assumptions about him or herself (i.e. self-attribution) or the behaviour, thoughts, feelings, or dispositions of a peer group (Rose et al., 1992). In other words, attributions can be considered as answers to “Why” questions (e.g. “Why did the product fail?”), based on what is known or assumed.

Ross et al. (1996) have shown that attributing a group’s behaviour to external causes (~ normative attribution process) provides an important mechanism for reducing perceived conformity

pressures. When no ready external explanations are available to the individual, he is left with the more speculative option of attributing the group's behaviour to internal causes (~ dispositional attribution process).

As far as misbehaving is concerned, some research has been done on attribution processes within a group pressure environment on the subject of illicit drug consumption (Rose et al., 1992, Rose et al., 1996, Rose et al., 2001). The most noteworthy implication of their research concerns the association of attribution processing with resistance to group pressure. They suggest that attributions about a peer group's deviant behaviour may play an important role in the decision-making of a potential dissenter in several different ways: conformity is lower among individuals who are able to explain salient group's behaviour through a normative attribution process (Rose et al., 1992); prior attitudes toward illicit consumption and susceptibility to social influence are moderating the attribution process in which individuals engage (Rose et al., 1996); and group attractiveness mediates the effects of attributions regarding peer-group illicit consumption on intention to conform (Rose et al., 2001).

Even though those studies focus on illicit drug consumption, they could be relevant in the purchase of counterfeited product misbehaviour. In many ways, product counterfeiting presents a problem similar to that of illicit drug (Bloch et al., 1993). In both cases, the problems rest on an exchange between buyer and seller and both parties share in responsibility for the practice. Besides, as with illegal drugs, reducing the supply of counterfeited products requires international cooperation. From the consumer's perspective, as with drugs, consumers who knowingly buy counterfeited products must exist to let these two demand-driven markets sustain and even develop. Bloch et al.

(1993) have shown that counterfeit-prone buyers differ in a number of ways from other consumers, in the same pattern as illegal drugs-prone buyers: they usually see themselves as less well-off financially, less successful and less confident than do other consumers.

Ethical Beliefs and Misbehaviour

Additional research (Rallapalli et al., 1994) attempted to draw a typology of consumers relating their personality traits and their ethical beliefs. Consumers showing "less ethical" beliefs concerning potential consumer action tend to have high needs for autonomy, innovation and aggression and/or are risk-takers. On the opposite, individuals with a high need for social desirability tend to have "more ethical" beliefs concerning consumer action. Since an individual's attitude toward counterfeiting and the counterfeiter's actions influence his intention to buy (Penz & Stöttinger, 2005), these pre-purchase level of ethical beliefs matter when dealing with counterfeiting issues.

The Consumer in Postmodernity

XXIst century consumers live in a social environment qualified by researchers as postmodern (Firat, 1991; Holt, 1997; Thompson & Holt, 1996) or even as hypermodern (Lipovetsky, 2004). The concept of Postmodernity was used for the very first time at the end of the 70's, with the intent to capture the new face of developed societies' cultural state. The postmodern era is characterized by the enlargement of the subjective area of autonomy, the multiplication of individual differences, the ending of classical social principles and the fading of the unity of ways of living and opinions. Conjointly, the postmodern individual is facing a never-ending process of consumption, with

various degrees of ethical matters and of what could be considered as ethically acceptable (Baudrillard, 1970; Baudrillard, 2004).

Who is the postmodern consumer?

Zygmunt Bauman (1993) used an interesting metaphor to describe the postmodern individual/consumer, introducing this individual as a tourist. Like the vagabond, the tourist knows that he will not stay long where he just arrived. He is ready to pay to fill his aesthetic needs: curiosity, need of amusement, wish and will to experience new experiences (assumed to be pleasurable and pleasurable novel, as well as exciting). He pays to get the freedom to disregard native concerns and feelings. He wants to redefine the world, or rather his world and his system of values. The tourist likes discovering new and unusual settings: he is looking for encountering foreign populations (without paying any interest to their preoccupations and needs). In the postmodern world, life is supposed to be continuously holiday time. This portrait of the postmodern individual/consumer looks like being far away from any ethical or moral concerns. It allows therefore counterfeiting to be part of consumption habits, sometimes without any feeling of guilt and/or knowledge of or consideration for its negative aspects regarding either people or economics (and brands). The postmodern consumer is living in a world of appearance, strengthened by the individualistic social context and hedonic sought of consumption. Actually, even if people are to be taken within their social environment in the postmodern times (Holt, 1997), which is the interest of this study, postmodern tribalism is more a state of mind (Sitz & Amine, 2004) and a deeply egoistic one: it is a way to find or express one's identity (Lipovetsky, 2004). This identity forging will be addressed later in this paper.

Consuming Society and counterfeiting

The postmodern era witnesses a reversal of production and consumption. Individuals are able to experience the whole life cycle of most of their belongings, whereas in all previous civilizations objects, tools or monuments were surviving to human generations (Baudrillard, 1970).

The main implication of this reversal is that consumption is not the end, but a moment where much is created and produced. It should no more be considered as a personal, private act of destruction by the consumer, but rather as a social act with symbolic meaning. "Consumption has become the means of self-realization, self-identification; a means of producing one's self and self-image" (Firat, 1991). The consumer needs to be sure of this identity, he has to display it to other consumers (Thompson & Holt, 1996). Therefore, peers' influence on consumption is key in choice processes (Witt & Bruce, 1970). Counterfeited luxury goods are conspicuous goods and therefore are useful signifiers of one's identity. They are a kind of substitute of status goods, highly desired by the postmodern consumers in general (Chang, 2005).

On top of this reversal of production and consumption lies a new theory of consumption, which relies on the basic principle that all individuals are equal with regard to needs and with regard to the principle of satisfaction of these needs (Baudrillard, 1970). This comes from the fact that all individuals are equal with regard to the usage value of goods, but not to the exchange value of them. Since consumption is a system enabling the display of signs related to the (identifiable) status of the consumer as well as the integration to a group of reference, consumption can be considered as a moral and a system of communication: it is an exchange structure. Once again, the purchase of counterfeited luxury goods is legitimated, or can be

legitimated by the consumer: it is a new moral code, a new social norm and a powerful tool to communicate with peers.

Postmodern ethics or the legitimating of counterfeits

Fragmentation of the consumer's life

Fragmentation is a major property of postmodern culture (Baudrillard, 1981; Jameson, 1983; Firat, 1991, 1992). By fragmentation, we mean the fact that all things are disconnected and disjointed in their representation from each other, their origins and history, and contexts. Firat (1992) identified 5 kinds of fragmentations present in contemporary life: fragmentation of the thoughts, desires and behaviours; fragmentation of the signifier from the signified; fragmentation of the product from its function; fragmentation of consumers' life experiences; fragmentation of the self into self-images. This last kind of fragmentation is particularly relevant for our research: it could provide an explanation for the process previously described of ethical dilemmas coping in the case of the purchase of counterfeited products. Besides, emphasis has been put on the consumer's need to belong to a group of reference and on his fate of being mimetic. We have conjointly mentioned the fact that the non-deceptive counterfeiting consumer can find himself experience a double-pressure: pressure of engaging in the misbehaviour and pressure coming from the social norms. Any outcome decision will result in the belonging to one group of pressure while being rejected by the other one. We believe that the postmodern fragmentation of identity can provide a good explanation of this acceptability of circumstances by the consumer. Actually, consumption may represent different images when used in different instances and contexts, in each instance producing the consumer's desired image (Firat, 1991). This schizophrenia of

consumption is perfectly coherent with the occasional purchase of counterfeited luxury goods. In this case, fragmentation and its medium, the market of counterfeited goods, constitute a new metanarrative we might be able to capture thanks to appropriate poststructuralist methods (Holt, 1997).

Juxtaposition of opposites

There is a wide ranging consensus among postmodernist theoreticians that one of the major characteristics is its paradoxical nature (Firat, 1991; Bauman, 1997; Lipovetsky, 2004). This is the direct consequence of the juxtaposition of contradictory emotions and cognitions regarding perspectives, commitments, ideas and things in general. Therefore, anything is at once acceptable: the postmodern era is the Times of "Polytheism of Values" (Lipovetsky, 2004). With the withdrawal of traditions, it's up to each individual to determine, invent his own moral. There are no more hard-and-fast principles which one can learn, memorize and deploy in order to escape situations without a good outcome and to spare oneself the bitter after-taste (scruples, guilty conscience, sin...). Moral decisions are ambivalent. Therefore, it is by designing his own system of value that the individual, or the reference group, can justify his misbehaviour and persuade him that he is in his own right. "It is the personal morality that makes ethical negotiations and consensus possible, not the other way round" (Bauman, 1997). The final moral is that if a product is in the market and it is being paid for, it must be all right... Here again, counterfeiting luxury goods does not appear as an illegal action but more as a logical one.

Decentring of the subject

In Postmodernity, there is, what is generally called, the "death of the subject" (Jameson, 1983). "The subject is decentred from its position of control, and

the subject-object distinctions are confused” (Firat, 1991). This is highly relevant when it comes to the consumption of counterfeited luxury goods: the product purchased sets the new parameters and the rules of the consumption process. We have already mentioned the separation process of the brand and of the product in the counterfeit market. In the case of luxuries, consumers are not buying the counterfeit for its functional properties but for its aesthetic properties (the logo) and the symbolism which goes along with it (Kocher et al., 2007). Now, uniqueness of the individual is attached to signifiers (brand names imitations) separated from their original referents. However, uniqueness itself, as a signifier, is detached from its original meaning and serves only as a communication tool towards peers from the reference group or the social group. This uniqueness is of high importance to set up one’s identity within an apparently homogeneous group: the identity belonging is not instantaneous, set for ever. Actually this expression of uniqueness, through the manipulation of the individual by the image of the consumed product itself, is a concern, a true demand and an appropriation tool for individuals. It is away to affirm oneself and get recognition from peers: the community belonging goes along with self-definition and self-interrogation processes (Lipovetsky, 2004). Postmodern Tribes in the counterfeit world are just new communitarian ways to give sense to one’s life (Maffesoli, 1988). It is the field where individualism, postmodern ethics, collectivism and self-definition are gathered, building new moral values allowing misbehaviours, relative and specific to this Tribe.

RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

Building upon the theoretical background presented in the previous part, we would like to propose several research directions we find of interest to be more widely investigated.

RP1: Postmodern consumers are looking for acquiring a status level, as a signifier of reference group. This leads to the mimetic desire of acquiring luxury or luxury-looking goods. When subject to peer-pressure from a group already misbehaving, the consumer may or may not choose to engage in the purchase of a counterfeited luxury product, depending on attribution processes and personal characteristics.

RP2: When considering the purchase of a counterfeited luxury good, the consumer is facing a double-pressure: one from the social environment (legal framework) and another one from his peers (the reference group of people who already buy counterfeits). Joining one group means being excluded from the other one. Postmodernist ethics (especially fragmentation and juxtaposition of opposites) can be the key helping the consumer to accept and deal with this rather uncomfortable situation.

RP3: When considering the purchase of a counterfeited luxury good, the consumer is engaging in ethical dilemmas. Postmodern ethics allow for original coping strategies and/or accept to live in this paradoxical state of being.

RP4: The purchase of counterfeited luxury goods in a social context is an acceptable or even logical behaviour for the postmodern consumer. He is doomed to behave like his peers (mimetic consumption) and this behaviour can be easily

justified by appropriate moral norms defined by the reference group. Besides, he finds himself decentred and manipulated by the counterfeits per se.

METHODOLOGY

Our research issue is to get knowledge and understandings about the impact of the social context, on the process of engaging/not engaging in non-deceptive counterfeiting. We will conduct our research in a Western Country, for usually in these countries counterfeiting is culturally and legally forbidden. This is not the case in Asian countries for example. Besides, figures provided by the European Union show that for instance France is a heavy consumer of counterfeited product, with one out of five counterfeited product being bought there (Source: L'Entreprise.com). Another feature of Western Countries, and especially France, is that usually counterfeited goods are sold in open-settings rather than in shops. This strengthens the illegality of the act of purchase and therefore some kind of social pressure.

Since our research issue is really to understand the mental/emotional process involved, we do need to focus on a physically existing research context. Therefore, we will not consider non-deceptive counterfeiting conducted through the use of 'virtual tools' such as the Internet (although we do admit that it is a very important channel of distribution for counterfeited goods).

Qualitative research looks like being the most appropriated way to begin our research, since our first purpose is really to get insights and understanding of the problem setting we have discussed in the previous part of this paper. Since we have limited experience and knowledge about

the research issue (although we do know what features we want to assess), exploratory research will be a useful step (Zikmund & Babin, 2003). This will be a first step to a more rigorous, conclusive, confirmatory study by reducing the chance of beginning with an inadequate, incorrect or misleading set of research objectives.

We have elicited three exploratory research designs we believe relevant to our research issue: the Observation Method, the Depth Interview Method combined with the use of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique and Projective Techniques.

Observation Method

According to Zikmund et al. (*Essentials of Marketing Research*, p161), "observational studies gather a wide variety of information about behaviour". Our research issue is really to get understanding about the impact of peer pressure on the process leading somebody to engage or refuse to engage in the purchase of a counterfeited product. Therefore the method is relevant. We would like to conduct observation with the following characteristics: unstructured, disguised, natural and personal. Since we are in an exploratory phase of our research, observation should be unstructured: we do need some flexibility in observation to identify key components of our problem and develop hypotheses. This is consistent with Malhotra's recommendation (2007) to use unstructured observation when the problem has still to be formulated precisely. However, this feature of the observation has a strong drawback: it displays a high potential for observer bias. Therefore, we should always keep in mind that the hypotheses we may come up with should be tested and not be considered as conclusive ones.

We know counterfeiting is a sensitive topic, and people may not be willing to show that they may/do

engage in non-deceptive counterfeiting. Therefore, we need to disguise our study and to conduct it in a natural setting, in which the true phenomenon will be more accurately reflected. However, the cost of waiting for the phenomenon to occur may be important. Besides, personal observation will enable us to avoid any attempt to control or influence the observed phenomenon, which is obviously key when you want to study behavioural issues in a sensitive setting.

For convenience reasons, although justified by the reputation of those places to be markets for counterfeits, we will choose to conduct our observations in France, on the French Riviera and in the North of Italy.

Strengths of the method

Observation allows measurement of actual behaviour rather than reports of intended or preferred behaviour. This is a big issue in our research process: previous studies on sensitive topics such as illicit drug consumption have shown that a huge difference could stand between real actions and intended one. Besides, the potential bias caused by the interviewer-interviewing process is almost reduced to none.

The second strength of the method in our research context is that it should enable us to capture behaviour patterns that the respondent is unaware of or unable to communicate. In the case of our study, people may not even be aware of the fact that they are in a sense “manipulated” by the social presence of pairs around them. Therefore, a simple survey could not provide us with deep insights on behaviour process itself.

Limits of the method

The most important weakness that we see is that observing behaviours cannot provide us with insights on underlying motives, beliefs, attitudes

and preferences. We could actually perceive all these features, but they will be highly subject to a selective perception bias. Observation can thus give us understandings on the impact of physically present peer pressure, but not on virtually present ones (reference group and social norms).

Besides, as we will be dealing with illegal activities, observing subjects without telling them has strong ethical issues and could be debatable.

Actually, it appeared to us that the Observation Method alone cannot be sufficient. It should be paired with another method, still exploratory, but more targeted and personal: the Depth Interview Method, combined with the use of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique.

Depth Interview

“Depth interviews are much the same as psychological, clinical interview” (Zikmund et al., 2003). Therefore, this research method suits our needs in understanding the rather mentally-driven impact of a non-physically present 3rd person on the behaviour process leading to the purchase or not-purchase of a counterfeited luxury good. It will enable us to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings. We need a detailed understanding of complicated behaviour and this can be at least partially assessed by depth interviews. Combining them with observation would be better, as previously stated.

Besides, to be able to capture the postmodern attitude of the consumer towards counterfeiting and solving of ethical dilemmas, we have to rely on very personal data and refer to a poststructuralist method of analysis (Holt, 1997). It is particularly relevant in the case of this research proposal, since we are investigating a real social patterning of consumption, patterning related to peers’ influence

on the intention to engage in the purchase of a counterfeited luxury good. To achieve this goal of understanding illegal consumption within a social context, we will use the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique or ZMET (Zaltman, 1996, 1997; Zaltman & Higie, 1993). This technique is particularly well-suited for labor-intensive use with small groups of 15 to 20 informants participating in lengthy and intensive depth interviews (Zaltman, 1996, p.16). Therefore, it is fully suited for our own research.

Briefly, ZMET rests on a number of premises concerning the meanings of products, brands, or consumption experiences in the minds of consumers. These include the recognition that such meanings are stored and communicated as images in general. To capture the metaphoric content of such images, ZMET asks informants to take representative photographs or to collect other relevant pictorial materials that reflect their consumption experiences or that indicate what some concepts of interest means to them. Later, these pictures are combined by informants, with accompanying stories, in the form of evocative and expressive montages.

Applied to our study, we would choose to ask people to collect relevant pictorial material to illustrate the following phrase **“What counterfeiting means to me”**. We would not focus on the luxury feature of our research, for we do think that consumers’ attitude towards counterfeited luxury goods is a specificities of consumers’ attitude towards counterfeiting in general. The specificities are related to the double peer-pressure, one related to the sought for conformity in displaying a luxury good and the other one related to the act of purchase of the counterfeit per se.

Strengths of the methods

Since a depth interview is conducted on a one to one basis, free exchange of information usually occurs: our subjects of study should feel no social pressure to conform to a group’s response, such as it is the case in the focus group method. This absence of others is especially relevant in our research context, for non-deceptive counterfeiting is a sensitive/embarrassing topic to be discussed, especially in Western Countries where it is strictly forbidden by official laws.

Risk-aversion and cultural dimensions such as uncertainty avoidance do have a lot of importance in the counterfeiting-purchase situation, mainly owing to strong social norms. At the same time, strong social norms do exist within some social group to display a brand logo and therefore to engage in non-deceptive counterfeiting. In both cases, we want to avoid a respondent to be swayed by group response and the one to one basis of depth interviews enables us to do so.

Besides, the use of the ZMET technique offers a real mean to hear the voice of the consumer, see through the eyes of the consumer, and keep the consumer and his experiences as the focal point of our research (Coulter, 2006).

Limits of the method

The biggest weakness of deep interviews is its lack of structure, counterbalanced in some way by the ZMET technique. Therefore, results will highly be susceptible to the interviewer’s influence. Besides, the quality and completeness of the results depend heavily on the interviewer’s skills. As novices in the research area, we do not pretend displaying such advanced skills and this may be a problem.

Besides, data will present a lot of psychological content, and some help will be needed to interpret it.

The second issue we will face deals with the sample: how can you draw a sample from a population composed of potential buyers of counterfeited products... How can you be sure that those willing to participate or those selected to participate do indeed feel social pressure... Our advice would be to draw the sample from the population we would have observed in the first part of our research process, to get consistency in the data (internal validity).

Projective techniques

This third methodological approach is relevant to get further insights on the respondents' underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes or feeling regarding the specific research issue we are dealing with. Its main feature is an unstructured and indirect form of questioning, which encourages the person engaging in non-deceptive counterfeiting to project his inner thoughts and feelings on something/somebody else. Zaltman (1997) argued that "gathering consumer expressions that include verbal, visual, dramatic, artistic and imaginary material encourages highly nuanced behavioural analyses, and also gets closer to the actual ways that individuals think, feel and imagine. We do not know yet precisely which projective technique will be used. This will depend on the results gained from the other methods, to confirm and/or complete them in a triangulation process.

Strengths of the method

The most important feature of projective techniques with regard to our research context is that they may elicit responses that subjects would be unwilling or unable to give if they knew the purpose of the study. Besides, given their origins in clinical psychology, these methods look at motivation with a harder, more realistic eye and can manage to

conceptualize it as involving competing psychological forces and as arising from different levels of consciousness (Rook, 2006). This is particularly relevant in our research context, since we assume that complex processes are involved in the impact of social pressure on an individual's behaviour, who usually finds himself tempted by the counterfeited good.

A second strength of this method is that it is relatively free from the social desirability bias which may occur in the two previously described methods. Counterfeiting consumption often occurs in normatively charged environments that abound with the notion of right and wrong. The indirect and ambiguous nature of projective questions should encourage the non-deceptive counterfeiters to stray from the party line, and more honestly express their true 'feelings' about their behavioural purchase process when subject to social pressure.

Lastly, projective techniques are usually considered as having the potential to go beyond consumers' surface-level explanations of their behaviour to elicit data that reflect deeper levels of personality, motivation and meaning. Therefore, in our research context, the method should be used as a direct complementary part to Depth Interviews.

Limits of the method

The greatest weakness of the method is once again the difficulty of conducting the research as a novice, plus the difficult data interpretation. Besides, there is a serious risk of interpretation bias. Here again the sample selection bias can occur: we would have to find respondents who agree to consider engaging in non-deceptive counterfeiting, which is by nature unusual consumption behaviour. Therefore the respondents could be themselves unusual in some way. They thus may not be representative of the population of interest.

FURTHER RESEARCHES & MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Additional Methodological Interesting Tools

We have presented several qualitative methods we do believe as relevant for our research. We would like to introduce here a recent qualitative research method which has been developed by Sayre (2006), namely video-elicitation. The technique is particularly relevant when the research context involves a potential reluctant population to be studied and an emotional sensitivity of the situation (following natural disaster period in the case of the conducted study). It combines story vignettes with visual projectives to produce a talk-show format for depth interviewing. The idea is that trust could be established through a fictitious survivor's verbal and visual disclosure. If the actor-victim appeared genuine and his or her comments plausible, respondents could identify with that person and be forthcoming about their own experience (Sayre, 2006). We do believe that this technique could be adapted to be used in our research context, although we admit that further investigations as of how to do this should be previously conducted.

Further issues to be investigated

Given the various aspects of counterfeiting and of luxury consumption throughout the world, we do believe that investigation how the cultural environment might impact on the pressure processes we have attempted to explain. Besides, the nature of the place of purchase as well as the conditions of purchase (tourist or local consumer) can also have influences on the research question. For instance, we do believe that for tourists another feature of postmodern consumption/life could be of some importance in the justification of buying counterfeited products: playfulness...

Another interesting investigation could be conducted taking into account the degree of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987) possessed by the consumers. This personal characteristic could have an impact on the conformity seeking towards a potential reference group. Once again, this feature will be highly culture-related...

Managerial Implications

As far as the business community is concerned, we do believe that the findings which would result from this research could provide professionals with more insight on the way people may be influenced in their intention to buy counterfeited products. Therefore new strategies to fight counterfeiting could be drawn, especially in terms of advertising campaigns dealing with anti-counterfeiting. So far, much of the campaigns have dealt with very normative messages focusing on economic or legal consequences. We believe that taking into account emotions and personal characteristics, with regard of cultural background could provide better results within certain communities. We would expect those better targeted and better designed communication campaigns to be more successful than the ongoing ones.

Conclusion

We have tried in this paper to present theoretical insights on a "hot" topic in the luxury industry: counterfeiting of luxury goods. We have advanced several potential explanations enabling the consumer to justify his misbehaviour and we have presented three qualitative methods potentially relevant to conduct our research, according to our research context. The main conclusion that we can draw from the previous study of these methods is that none of them should be implemented alone, but rather that triangulation should be used in our social context. Observations would enable us to get the

most obvious patterns of the behavioural purchasing process of our respondents and to come up with potentially representative samples. Then depth interviews combined with the Zeltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique should be used to get better insights on the underlying processes of which the respondents are aware and that they are willing to report. Lastly, projective techniques would be the key to uncover unexpressed underlying features of the behavioural processes, cancelling any social desirability bias. Still, even if internal validity should be ensured, we should always keep in mind that external validity is not the objective of this exploratory phase of the research. All hypotheses will have to be tested in further quantitative studies.

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