

Full Length Research Paper

The potential paradox of endorsers' exterior traits: Worship at what cost?

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This study applies Balance Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model to explain consumers' counterfeit purchase behaviors. The results find that endorsers' exterior traits enhance not only consumers' worship levels, but also foster consumers' counterfeit purchase behaviors. Endorsers' interior traits enhance only worship levels, but not counterfeit purchase behaviors. In contrast, the role of worship level is to minimize the positive association between exterior traits and counterfeit purchase behaviors. Elder consumers display more counterfeit purchase behaviors than do younger consumers. This study contributes to the literature by extending the focus of the products to the focus of the endorsers and indicating that how people judge an endorser (i.e., the traits of the endorser) influences the actions they take on the endorsed authentic goods or counterfeiting counterparts. The study raises a contradiction for the application of celebrity endorsement, namely; augmenting endorsers' exterior traits substantially encourages consumers' counterfeit purchase behaviors unless the worship due to exterior could be motivated to a high level so as to counterbalance the detrimental effect of exterior. Emphasizing endorsers' interior traits intensifies consumers' worship level but not at the expense of authentic goods. Study implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Key words: Idol worship, counterfeit.

INTRODUCTION

Counterfeiting is an international issue that has substantial impacts on many aspects such as business, law, and politics. The international trade in counterfeit and pirated products could have been up to USD 200 billion in 2005 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007), and the International Chamber of Commerce even estimates the value of counterfeit and pirated goods is more than USD 600 billion annually (Sebban, 2007). The reason for this lucrative business is that the margins are high and demand is strong (Ang, Cheng, Lim and Tambyah, 2001). As to the music industry, the situation can be worse off; it is estimated about 37% of all CDs purchased in 2005 were pirate (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, 2006). Purchases of counterfeit or pirated goods have

proliferated worldwide, and have stimulated both firms and scholars alike to verify why such behaviors occur.

A review study has summarized the purchases of counterfeit products or pirating behaviors are related to the product, the situation, the cultural context, and the consumer (Eisend and Schuchert-Güler, 2006). For instance, Chiou, Huang, and Lee (2005) find that satisfaction with original products, perceived prosecution risk, perceived negative consequence, and social consensus are determinants of music pirating behaviors. de Matos, Ituassu, and Rossi (2007) find that risk perception, price-quality inference, past behavior, subjective norm, personal integrity, and gratification influence an individual's attitude toward counterfeit purchase. LaRose and Kim (2007) confirm that expected outcomes of piracy and deficient self-regulation are important determinants of pirating intentions. Levin, Dato-on, and Manolis (2007) find that threat appeals, past behavior, and subject norms affect consumer's pirating behaviors. As to the theoretical perspectives, most of current studies are advocates of

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Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985), or Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) in developing their research frameworks.

On the other hand, marketing practices have applied celebrity endorsement, rooted in the Classical Conditioning Theory, to enhance the appeal of a product by repeated pairing between endorser and endorsed item in hopes the endorser's agreeable traits could be transferred to the endorsed item (DiClemente and Hantula, 2003). Certainly, this manipulation by marketers aims at boosting authentic goods, yet this study posits that endorser's qualities may also influence the appearance of counterfeit or pirated goods. Based on field insight, counterfeit goods often emerge in the market when authentic goods are popularly accepted. As a result, endorser's positive traits originally used to strengthen the image of authentic goods may also indirectly act on the proliferation of counterfeit goods. Therefore, extant theoretical perspectives may be deficient in explaining the purchase of counterfeit goods due to fandom behavior, and the study attempts to develop new perspectives in this regard. Specifically, the objective of this study is to investigate the relationships between endorser's characteristics (e.g., exterior and interior traits), consumer's worship behaviors, and consequential counterfeit purchase behaviors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Balance Theory (Heider, 1946) posits that people in their cognitive structure will try to maintain a psychological balance between themselves, other person, and other object. According to the proposition, consumers in order to achieve a psychological balance should form favorable attitudes toward the original genuine products and unfavorable attitudes toward the counterfeit products when the original genuine products are endorsed by their favorite idols. Celebrities set up the perspectives that consumers may employ to realize the brands or products, and highly worshipping consumers may tend to identify with their favorite celebrity's perspectives (Maxwell and Dickman, 2007). Consumers usually manifest their worship behaviors through purchasing the authentic goods of their idols (Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv and Ben-Horin, 1996). Idol adoration consumers also show more favorable attitudes and stronger purchase intentions toward an idol's goods (Chiou, Huang and Chuang, 2005). When these consumers purchase the authentic goods, there are no needs for them to obtain the counterfeit goods. Therefore, idol adoration and counterfeit purchase behaviors are theoretically negatively correlated, but empirical evidences are mixed (Chiou, Huang and Lee, 2005). Indeed, consumers may not care whether an artist is financially harmed, and thus attributing potential harm to an idol may not be effective in deterring consumers from pirating behaviors (Levin, Dato-on and Manolis, 2007). Hence, the cognition facets may not always

underlie people's idol worship behaviors, and the Balance Theory appears to be limited in explaining consumer's counterfeit purchase behaviors. This study further delves into the issue of counterfeit purchase from perspectives of why and how consumers worship idols.

Marketing information can be categorized as extrinsic cues (e.g., price information) and intrinsic cues (e.g., quality information). High-knowledge consumers are better able to comprehend intrinsic cues in product judgments (Rao and Monroe, 1988). Likewise, because idol's exterior (e.g., attractive dressing and body shape) and interior traits (e.g., knowledgeable and clever) are critical determinants for a consumer to judge, position, and then worship a celebrity (Lin and Lin, 2007), this study postulates that worship due to interior traits is based on cognition process, and lead to a higher level of worship. On the contrary, adoration due to an idol's superficial exterior traits is intuitive and thus causes lower level of worship.

In addition, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) proposes two routes of persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. Central route involves careful scrutiny of a persuasive communication to determine the merits of arguments, and thus requires a great deal of thought and knowledge. Under the condition of central route, people's cognitive ability plays an important role in determining the persuasive outcome. On the other hand, peripheral route does not involve extensive elaboration of arguments, and thus requires less thought and knowledge. Generally, attitudes formed through central route are more stable over time and more resistant to persuasion than those formed through peripheral route. Cognitive individuals are rational and logical thinkers (Venkatraman and MacInnis, 1985). Consciously rational thinkers tend to encode reality in abstract symbols using central route to persuasion, while unaware thinkers tend to encode reality in concrete images via peripheral routes (Woodside and Chebat, 2001). If idol's interior traits are analogous to abstract symbols and exterior traits to concrete images, such different cues should result in distinct consequences about counterfeit purchase behaviors because different routes to persuasion are used.

In the context of celebrity worship and counterfeit purchase behavior, adoration attitudes associated with interior traits should be formed and intensified through central route because these high level worshipers may be motivated and have the ability to process persuasive message. Thus, worship due to interior traits results in stronger and more favorable attitudes toward the idol, which in turn result in negative attitudes toward the purchase of counterfeit products. Conversely, worshipers who depend more on an idol's exterior traits may be constrained by their cognitive abilities to elaborate the illegal counterfeit persuasion, and hence the attitudes formed through peripheral route may be less favorable toward the idol because the role of worship has been minimized. Consequently, an idol's exterior traits, as processed through peripheral route, may directly cause a

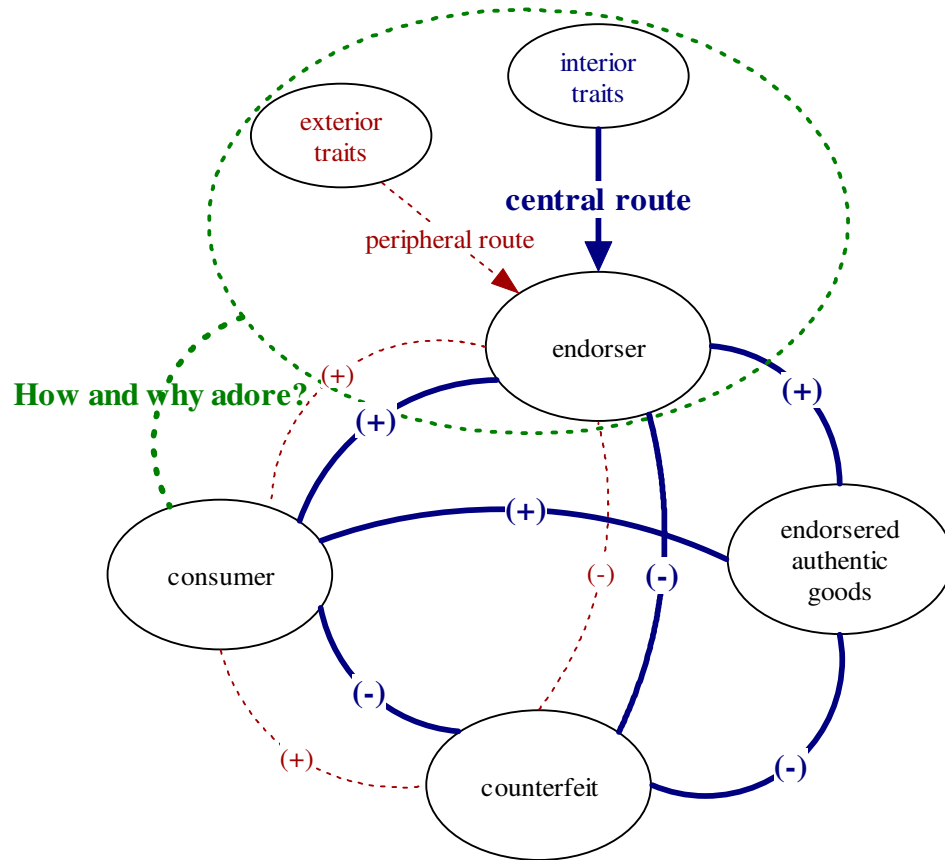


Figure 1. Integration of balance theory and elaboration likelihood model in explaining counterfeit purchase.

consumer's counterfeit purchase behavior. Moreover, based on above discussion derived from Balance Theory, worship level will become a moderator and diminish the positive effect of exterior traits on counterfeit purchase behavior.

According to above theoretical perspectives, Figure 1 exhibits the train of thought which integrates the balance theory and the elaboration likelihood model in explaining counterfeit purchase. Although most of the studies concerning counterfeit purchase focus on the product per se (either authentic or counterfeit), this study further extends the focus to the endorser who endorses the original products. It is expected that the relationships between consumer, endorser, endorsed goods, and counterfeit goods are maintained in a balanced state (the bold lines in Figure 1). When the focal consumer likes the endorser, who endorses a fashion product such as jeans, the consumer should favor the endorsed authentic jeans, rather than the counterfeit ones. However, these balanced relationships do not always hold when the consumer from time to time purchases counterfeits even the authentic counterparts are endorsed by his or her favored endorsers (the dotted imbalanced dyad in the lower left of Figure 1). People may need a moderate

cognitive ability to achieve a psychological balance in one's cognitive structure. The issue can then be how and why consumers adore the endorsers (the dotted circle in Figure 1). When the focal consumer adores the endorser due to the interior traits, the consumer may use the central route in assessing the qualities of both the endorser and the endorsed goods, and under the cognitive process the focal consumer is expected to actively seek a psychological balance, and thus counterfeit purchase is unlikely (the bold lines in Figure 1). On the contrary, when the focal consumer adores the endorser due to the exterior traits, the consumer may apply the peripheral route, and therefore such intuitive process may guide the consumer unaware of a psychological unbalance or may constrain the consumer from solving such a unbalance, and thus counterfeit purchase is likely even when the consumer have favorable attitude toward the endorser (the dotted lines in Figure 1). Based on above arguments, this study aims to

H₁: An idol's exterior trait is positively correlated with consumer's worship toward this idol.

H₂: An idol's interior trait is positively correlated with consumer's worship toward this idol.

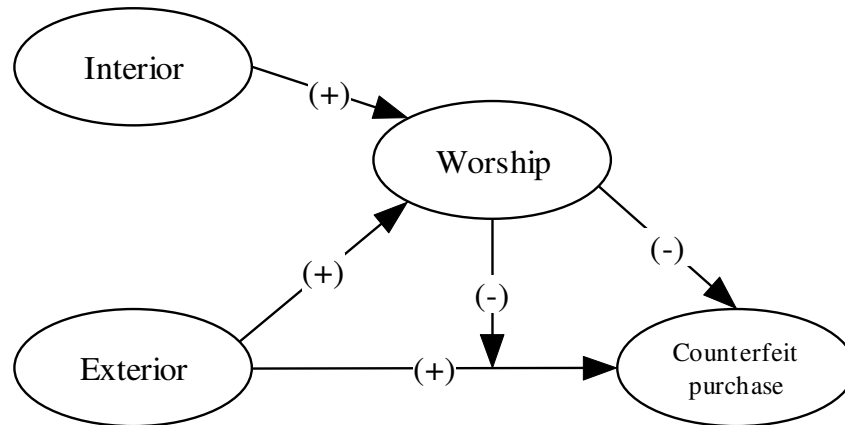


Figure 2. Research framework.

examine below hypotheses. Figure 2 illustrates the research framework.

H₃: An idol's interior trait has stronger effect on consumer's worship toward this idol than does exterior trait.

H₄: An idol's exterior trait is positively correlated with consumer's counterfeit purchase, given the original authentic counterparts are endorsed by this idol.

H₅: Worship toward the idol endorser is negatively correlated with consumer's counterfeit purchase of the endorsed products.

H₆: Worship level negatively moderates the positive correlation between idol's exterior trait and consumer's counterfeit purchase. That is, worship level mitigates the positive correlation between exterior and counterfeit purchase.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study developed a questionnaire to collect data for examining the research hypotheses. Survey data were collected by trained data collectors who were university students majoring in marketing courses. The respondents were asked to select their favorite idols who endorse for fashion products such as bags, jeans, clothes and glasses to answer questions in the questionnaire. During the process, data collectors approached 300 convenient samples in Taiwan, and gathered 289 usable questionnaires with a response rate of 96%.

Sample characteristics

The sample of respondents is composed of more female (53.3%) than male (46.7%). A total of 51% of the respondents are 20 or under 20 years old, and 49% are over 21 years old; the mean age is 20.5 years. As to the occupation, 27% of the sample is non-student, and junior high school, senior high school, and university students are 21, 20 and 31%, respectively. Table 1 summarizes the sample characteristics.

The gender of the sample's favorite idols is more male (60.6%) than female (39.4%). Most (81.3%) of the selected favorite idols are

celebrities in media or entertainment fields (e.g., actors, singers, or athletes). Table 2 summarizes the idol characteristics.

Measures

The constructs of perceived exterior and interior traits about respondent's favorite idol were measured using 3 items, respectively, adapted from Lin and Lin (2007), for example, good-looking, attractive dressing, and attractive body shape for exterior, and humorous and funny, knowledgeable and clever, and civic-minded and caring for interior. The worship level was measured using the 17-item celebrity worship scale (McCutcheon, Lange and Houran, 2002). Sample items included: "I enjoy watching, reading, or listening to my favorite idol because it means a good time"; "I love to talk with others who admire my favorite idol"; "I am obsessed by details of my favorite idol's life"; and "The successes of my favorite idol are my successes also." The worship level suggests three increasingly extreme sets of idol worship behavior: individualistic behaviors, social activities, and borderline pathology. When worship level increases, these behaviors increasingly occur together, so the celebrity worship construct is considered as one-dimensional (McCutcheon, Lange and Houran, 2002). Actual counterfeit purchase behaviors were measured using 5 items modified from Chiou, Huang, and Lee (2005). Specifically, this study measured respondents' actual behaviors associated with the purchase of counterfeit or pirated goods (e.g., counterfeit bags or pirated T-shirts), of which the original authentic counterparts were endorsed by their favorite idols. In addition, all the measurement items were measured on 5-point scales anchored by "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (5).

RESULTS

Measurement reliability was assessed with the Cronbach's alpha. As shown in Table 3, the results indicate an alpha coefficient of 0.90 for idol's exterior, 0.73 for idol's interior, 0.94 for worship level, and 0.88 for counterfeit purchase. Overall, measurement reliabilities are adequate in this study. For subsequent analyses, construct mean scores were calculated by averaging their respective measured items.

This study first conducted correlation analyses to examine the correlations between constructs. As shown

Table 1. Respondent characteristics.

Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Female	154	53.3
Male	135	46.7
Age (mean age = 20.5)		
Under 20 (including 20)	147	50.9
Over 21	142	49.1
Occupation		
Junior High School Student	61	21.1
Senior High School Student	59	20.4
University Student	90	31.1
Non-Student	79	27.3

Table 2. Idol characteristics.

Characteristic	N	%
Idol's gender		
Female	114	39.4
Male	175	60.6
Idol type		
Media Stars (actor, singer, or athlete)	235	81.3
Others (politicians, intellectual, or entrepreneurs)	54	18.7

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and correlations.

	M	SD	Exterior	Interior	Worship	Counterfeit purchase	Age
Exterior	3.79	1.11	0.90				
Interior	3.86	0.87	0.43***	0.73			
Worship	3.06	0.87	0.37***	0.38***	0.94		
Counterfeit Purchase	2.35	1.08	0.15***	0.05	-0.01	0.88	
Age	20.50	5.85	-0.04	0.08	-0.01	0.16***	N.A.

Numbers along the diagonal show the Cronbach's alpha. Bold numbers below the diagonal represent the correlations between constructs. *** $p < 0.01$.

in Table 3, both exterior and interior are positively associated with respondents' worship levels ($p < 0.01$). Counterfeit purchase is positively correlated with idol exterior ($p < 0.01$) and respondent's age ($p < 0.01$), but had no correlations with idol interior and worship level (N.S.). Notably, respondent's age is associated with only counterfeit purchase, but is not related to exterior, interior, and worship level. According to the mean score of respondents' worship levels ($M = 3.06$) and counterfeit purchase ($M = 2.35$), the sample represents modest level of worship and counterfeit purchase behaviors.

This study then conducted regression analyses to

examine the effects of independent variables on worship level and counterfeit purchase. To reduce potential multicollinearity, independent variables were centered [that is, put in deviation score form so that its mean was zero] Aiken and West, 1991]. As exterior and interior are positively correlated (see Table 3) and to test H_1 , this study regressed worship level on exterior and interior simultaneously. One-tailed significance levels in regression analyses are reported because directional hypotheses are based on strong theoretical arguments (Reinartz, Krafft and Hoyer, 2004). Table 4 shows the regression analyses results. The results of Model 1 show

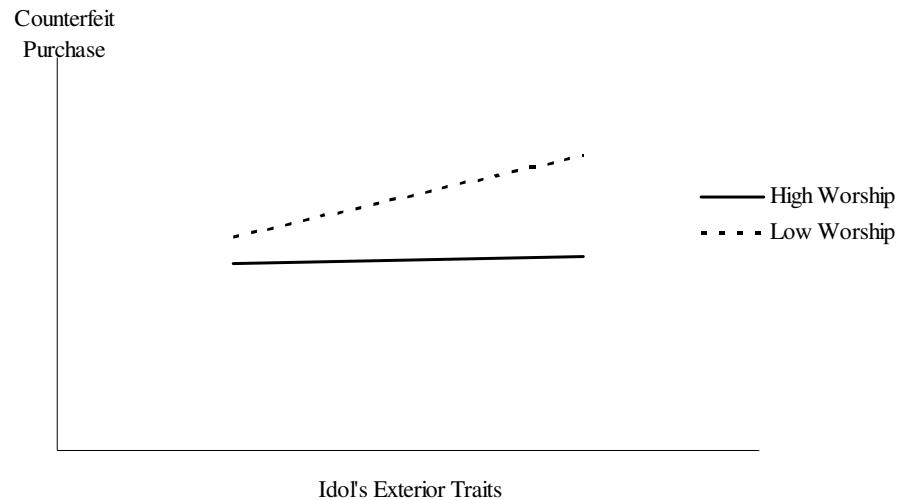


Figure 3. Effects of exterior and worship on counterfeit purchase.

Table 4. Regression analyses results.

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
		Worship Level	Counterfeit purchase	Counterfeit purchase
Exterior		0.25*** (4.28)	0.19*** (2.90)	0.15** (2.08)
Interior		0.28*** (4.73)	-0.02 (-0.32)	-0.02 (-0.26)
Worship level		-	-0.06 (-0.96)	-0.05 (-0.77)
Exterior × Worship level		-	-	-0.13** (-1.74)
Interior × Worship level		-	-	0.01 (0.01)
Respondent's age		-0.02 (-0.45)	0.17*** (2.86)	0.16*** (2.68)
R ²		0.20	0.05	0.07
ΔR ²		-	-	0.02
ΔF		-	-	2.35*

t-values in parentheses; One-tailed significance levels. ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

that both idols' exterior and interior traits have positive effects on worship level ($p < 0.01$), but the effect of interior is stronger than that of exterior (0.28 vs. 0.25), and thus H_1 , H_2 and H_3 are confirmed. People tend to be more fascinated with their idols when the worship target is high on exterior and interior traits, in particular interior traits.

This study next conducted hierarchical regression analyses to examine the effects of exterior, interior and worship level on counterfeit purchase. Respondent's age was included as a control variable due to its association with counterfeit purchase (Table 3). Model 2 examines the main effects of exterior, interior, and worship level on counterfeit purchase. The results reveal that exterior has significantly positive effect on counterfeit purchase ($p < 0.01$), whereas the effects of interior and worship level are non-significant. H_4 is supported, but H_5 is not confirmed. Model 3 further investigates the interaction effects between exterior, interior, and worship level on counterfeit purchase. The results show that exterior still

has significantly positive effect on counterfeit purchase ($p < 0.05$), although the significance level is reduced. In addition, the interaction between exterior and worship level has significantly negative effect on counterfeit purchase ($p < 0.05$), so H_6 is confirmed.

To summarize above results, both exterior and interior have positive effects on worship level. Idol's exterior traits and respondent's age have positive effects on counterfeit purchase. Worship level has negative effective on the positive association between exterior and counterfeit purchase, or in other words, worship level mitigates the positive effect of exterior on counterfeit purchase. However, worship level has no direct effect on counterfeit purchase.

Moreover, to better explain the form of interaction between exterior and worship level, this study plotted the interaction effect in the graph illustrated in Figure 3, using one standard deviation above and below the mean to capture effects of high and low worship level (Aiken and West, 1991). From Figure 3, idol exterior traits strengthen

consumer's counterfeit purchase behavior when the worship level is low. Counterfeit purchase behavior is less influenced by idol exterior traits when the worship level is high. Furthermore, when exterior level is low, counterfeit purchase behaviors show minor differences between high and low worshipers. However, when endorsers' exterior becomes more attractive, low worshipers exhibit much more counterfeit purchase behaviors than do high worshipers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study results find that idols' exterior traits enhance consumers' worship levels, and also directly galvanize consumers' counterfeit purchase behaviors; idols' interior traits incite only worship levels, but not counterfeit purchase behaviors. In contrast, the role of worship level is to minimize the positive association between exterior and counterfeit purchase. Elder consumers display more counterfeit purchase behaviors than do younger consumers. This study contributes to the literature by indicating that how people judge an endorser (i.e., based on exterior or interior traits of the endorser) influences the actions they take on the endorsed authentic goods or counterfeiting counterparts. Specifically, endorsers' interior traits should be emphasized in deterring consumers from counterfeit purchase behaviors. The results have considerable practical and theoretical implications for fashion and entertainment industries discussed below.

The emergence of counterfeits suggests that the authentic goods are influential and in short supply in the market (Lim, 2006). Legal systems such as trademark registration, criminal and civil procedures maybe effective in preventing counterfeiting goods (Clark, 2008); however, due to the short product life cycles in fashion and entertainment industries, legal systems to suppress counterfeits (e.g., filing a lawsuit) is time-consuming, and the crackdown results are not always satisfied (Lim, 2006). Since expecting counterfeits goods to disappear in the market is not so practical, appealing customers not to buy counterfeits becomes feasible. The results of this study imply that the concept of the product endorser may hinder consumers from purchasing counterfeits when endorsers' interior traits are highlighted.

Ironically and interestingly, the results suggest that low idol exterior traits cannot even activate consumers' counterfeit purchase behaviors, let alone the purchase of authentic counterparts. Paradoxically, augmenting exterior traits substantially encourages consumers' counterfeit purchase behaviors unless the worship due to exterior could be motivated to a high level so as to counterbalance the detrimental effect of exterior.

The results of this study should be reasonable. Similar to the purchase of authentic goods, consumers should have constructed an evoked set for the counterfeit or pirated goods, and they may not consider products

endorsed by a celebrity of low exterior level as these products are under the inept set, inert set, or even unawareness set. However, although the use of celebrity endorsement is prevalent in marketing practice to transfer consumers' positive attitudes toward a celebrity onto the endorsed items (Chiou, Huang and Chuang, 2005), and therefore to improve marketing effectiveness (Till and Shimp, 1998) and achieve persuasion (Freiden, 1984), the results exhibit that these manipulations through idol adoration do not always benefit the endorsed products, and idol's exterior traits may sometimes have adverse effects on authentic goods.

Therefore, the study raises a contradiction for the application of celebrity endorsement, namely - heightened exterior traits may reinforce not only worship levels but also counterfeit purchase behaviors. Although beautiful endorsers may rouse consumers' positive attitude toward the endorsed goods (Dion, Berscheid and Walster, 1972), the study suggests enterprises may less depend on endorsers' exterior traits to promote their products. In fact, consumers sometimes only involve in superficially trivial messages about celebrities, rather than in-depth messages (Pringle, 2004). It is probably that individuals with lower cognitive abilities are attracted by idols' exterior traits (McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran and Maltby, 2003), and the low cognitive ability may also lead to the ineffective dissuasion about illegal counterfeit purchase behaviors. Since the effect of interior traits on counterfeit purchase is neutral, a helpful strategy for marketing practitioners should be more emphasizing idols' interior traits, which intensify worship level but not at the expense of original authentic goods. Moreover, as idol adoration behavior involves irrational perfect idol illusion which may finally decreases people's well-being (Lin and Lin, 2007), de-emphasizing the role of idols' exterior traits can also neutralize the detrimental effects due to people's cognitive deficits.

Some future research directions arise from the results of this study. This research finds that consumer's age positively influences counterfeit purchase behavior, and this result is opposite to past studies (Cheung and Prendergast, 2006; Tan, 2002). Although younger consumers may be constrained by their budgets, elder consumers may perceive more economic pressure or life pressure, and hence are more value conscious, which facilitates counterfeit purchase behaviors (Ang, Cheng, Lim and Tambyah, 2001). Consumers may also become more sophisticated and educated with increasing ages, and their accumulated experiences of counterfeit goods (de Matos, Ituassu and Rossi, 2007; Tom, Garibaldi, Zeng and Pilcher, 1998) and higher education levels (Cheung and Prendergast, 2006) all enhance their counterfeit purchase intentions. Counterfeit purchasers perceive less risk toward counterfeit goods, which in turn increase their future counterfeit purchase intentions (Ha and Lennon, 2006). Therefore, prior experience and counterfeit purchase may be mutually reinforced. Taken together, the

effect of consumer's age on counterfeit purchase behavior seems indeterminate, and longitudinal studies are required to clarify this potential confounding.

In addition, for those genuine products using celebrity endorsement strategy, the market position should be high and thus highly priced. The high prices may prevent consumers from purchasing the genuine goods, and encourage consumers to consider counterfeits. On the other hand, the prices of the counterfeits must be lower than those of their genuine counterparts. Future studies may consider relative prices of genuine and counterfeit goods in explaining counterfeit purchase behaviors.

Moreover, celebrity endorsement practices can be categorized as celebrity customers, celebrity product placements, celebrity sponsorship, celebrity testimonial, celebrity employees, and celebrity brand ownership (Pringle, 2004), and future research can examine if these applications cause different effects on counterfeit purchase. Finally, our perspectives derived from the Balance Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model should be regarded as complements of previous studies in explaining counterfeit purchase behaviors. Further studies should examine the relative explanatory powers between alternative theories, namely - the perspectives posited in the study as well as the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Social Cognitive Theory.

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