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Full Length Research Paper

Consumers' purchase attitudes toward Shanzhai products: An empirical study of Chinese consumers

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Shanzhai products have witnessed a huge growth China market. Although the shanzhai problem has been discussed in the literature, most of the studies are mainly literature review, practical report, or theoretical analysis. Empirical research remains scarce, especially the examination of underlying key purchase determinants of shanzhai purchase from consumer behavior perspective. This study embeds the shanzhai phenomenon into the consumer behavior literature by unveiling the underlying mechanism of drivers of its purchase, and identifying the relationship between the purchase determinant and its purchase attitude, besides, understanding the link between the attitude and the purchase behavior intention. Specifically, it conducts a quantitative survey with 200 undergraduate consumers in China market and uses the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique to test the hypothesized relationships. The study unravels those consumers' intentions to buy shanzhai products are dependent on the attitudes they have toward shanzhai, which in turn are influenced by degree of satisfaction, product attributes and price preference, but not by social influence. The paper reinforces the mediator role of attitude in the relationship between the antecedents and behavioral intentions of shanzhai purchase, and it contributes to inform policy makers and product managers of the main predictors of consumer's attitudes toward shanzhai. Therefore, shanzhai should continue to offer good price and innovative features, interesting product design and improved product experience, and increase satisfaction of customers.

Key words: Shanzhai, product attributes, price, degree of satisfaction, social influence, attitude, purchase intention.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, shanzhai has emerged to be a popular product typology, and is a significant and growing issue in Mainland China (Keane, 2016). Shanzhai is a unique Chinese term referring to product originating from an imitation of a focal product design, but with its own brand name.

The contemporary use of the term shanzhai originates in the Cantonese dialect. Initially, it refers to unlicensed or fake brand cell phones, and hence has unofficial or illegal overtones. "Shanzhai" was the most popular

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Author(s) agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the <u>Creative Commons Attribution</u> <u>License 4.0 International License</u> internet slang since the year 2008, and it becomes popular overnight; nowadays it has extended from "shanzhai products" to "shanzhai phenomenon" and "shanzhai culture" (Yan, 2009, 2010), it has split over into everyday commerce, manifest in shanzhai mobile phones, cosmetics, handbags and watches-even shanzhai movie stars and blockbusters (Xi, 2009). What exactly is "shanzhai"? Its literal meaning, "mountain camp," originates in ancient Chinese history. "Shanzhai" was roughly translated as "knockoff" or "underground" gala in New York Times (Jacobs and Ansfield, 2009). From Wall Street Journal, "shanzhai" refers to imitations of well-known brands, products, and other popular items (Canaves et al., 2009). However, "shanzhai" is definitely not the core of fake and shoddy, nor is it simply the sense of a low level of copying and imitation, but innovation (Manhua, 2009; Daiyang, 2010; Chen and Zhou, 2012). Although disgruntled at the shanzhai onslaught, most people maintain an attitude of genial bemusement.

Most Shanzhai products are from industries like electronics, such as mobile phone and MP3, which are high profitable and are launched to the market very quickly. Shanzhai production has many advantages. First, it has cost advantage, for instance, it has no license fee, no 17 percent added-value tax, no 30 to 40% checking fee to the relevant government departments, and no sales and receipt tax (Xi, 2009). Also, its running cost is further minimized by the absence of marketing and after-sales service. Second, shanzhai operations respond instantly to market demand by producing new cell phone models every one or two months. While shanzhai products are no longer strictly low-end, that is to say, they are of equal or even better quality than those manufactured by international big names, as well as exported to foreign market; thus, they threaten both foreign and domestic manufacturers seriously.

Shanzhai in an emerging market is a unique phenomenon. Most shanzhai products are manufactured in China, and exported to India and some other countries. While copycat "shanzhai" culture takes on a life of its own in China, surprisingly, insufficient research has been dedicated to understanding the shanzhai phenomenon in China, especially from the perspective of consumer behavior.

While consumer demand for counterfeit products has been well-documented in the previous literature (Eisend and Schuchert-Gu⁻⁻ ler, 2006; Staake et al., 2009), Shanzhai has barely received any attention in the consumer study field; to the best of our knowledge, no research has been conducted to understand Chinese consumers' attitudes and behavior toward shanzhai products. Most articles about shanzhai are report or newspaper, lacking empirical study. Besides, many people regard shanzhai as counterfeits or fake goods resulting in their misunderstanding of shanzhai.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the main antecedents of consumers' attitudes toward shanzhai and

their purchase intention outcome. The findings not only provide managerial implications for shanzhai manufacturers, but more importantly, it is of great value to encourage innovation and development of shanzhai products in developing country like China. Our results also provide path for weak brands which are late entrance to develop strong brand.

The article is presented in five parts. First, a brief review of shanzhai and the aim of the study are stated. Second, the main antecedents and consequences of consumers' attitudes toward shanzhai, as well as their meaning and origin are listed, resulting in a conceptual model to be tested. Third, the conceptual model was tested by means of the structural equation modeling. Fourth, a discussion of the main results is presented. Finally, the conclusions are presented, including the main contribution of the study and strategies managers can use in order to improve consumers' attitudes toward shanzhai products.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The model we propose in this paper is shown in Figure 1. It is similar with the model proposed in Ang et al. (2001). The model Ang et al. (2001) proposed examined five major antecedents of consumers. In this paper, we examined four integrated factors by including price preference, social influence, product attributes and degree of satisfaction into the predictors list.

As the major difference between shanzhai and an original focal product is mainly price factor, therefore the price construct is likely to be important factor related to attitude toward shanzhai (Huang et al., 2004; Leng and Zhang, 2011), Shanzhai products provide interesting additional features through imitation and local innovation (Leng and Zhang, 2011), and more importantly, shanzhai products are very inexpensive and offer very competitive low pricing, which makes shanzhai very attractive to consumers. As shanzhai products are value-conscious may have positive attitude towards shanzhai. Hence, it is expected that:

H1. Price preference has a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward shanzhai products.

Social influence concerns the social environment and culture, such as whether people purchase shanzhai because of other people's influence on them. No studies in the previous literature have ever estimated that whether social influence and behavior intention toward shanzhai are relevant or not.

Developed initially from electronic industry, with a gradual process of development, Shanzhai industries have gone far beyond copying and have emerged as a

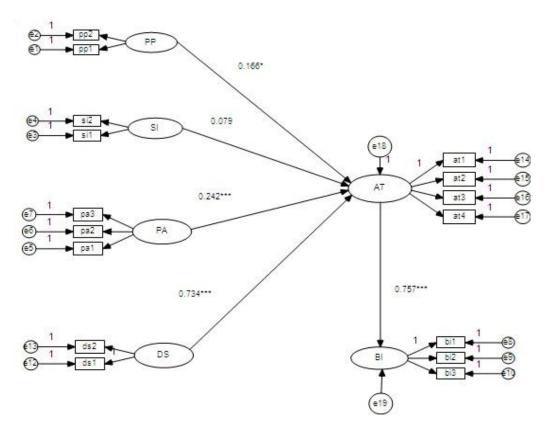


Figure 1. Conceptual model for attitude toward shanzhai products. Note: PP-Price Preference, SI-Social Influence, PA-Product Attributes, DS-Degree of Satisfaction, AT-Attitudes toward Shanzhai, BI-Behavioral Intentions; path coefficients are marked beside the path. Model fit: χ 2=280.3, d*f*=99, p=0.000, AGFI=0.797, GFI=0.852, NFI=0.846, IFI=0.894, CFI=0.893, RMSEA=0.096.

new marketing model by means of "copy, imitation, learning, innovation and improvement" in big brands (Yin et al., 2010). Shanzhai has moved beyond cloning and enabled a wealth of iterative innovations by providing interesting additional features (Deng and Li, 2010). Some Shanzhai products even successfully counterattack the leading brand (Deng and Li, 2010; Jiang and Shan, 2016). And we witness a growing number of consumers purchasing shanzhai product, and the market share of shanzhai, especially in electronic product industries has risen to great extent and has become a fashion trend among consumers and become a topic nationwide. For the above reason, it is expected that:

H2. Social influence has a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward shanzhai products

With a gradual process of development, Shanzhai industries have gone far beyond copying; it continues to fill the product positioning gap by innovating new product function though the market size is limited, or to say the niche market. Shanzhai adopts a imitation-plus-innovation approach to manufacture customized products (Chubb, 2015). For instance, shanzhai cell phones offer more sim card within one phone, larger sound and more customized colors and package, in international market; it offers customized color and shape catering to different religious customers and customers under different cultures. Examples like "MI" in China begin by copying the look and designs of the Apple Iphone; "MI"quickly breaks technical barriers and makes improved cellphones by providing additional features such as being less power-hungry and availability at a lower price. Because of this, it is hypothesized that:

H3. Product attribute has a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward shanzhai products

Degree of satisfaction concerns customers' personal gratification, that is to say, a sense of accomplishment. Besides the attractive low price, shanzhai offers more innovative product with more interesting features, more attractive product design and caring service experience.

Shanzhai products can be seen as alternative sources of innovation and local adaptation, offering attractive prices, and additional functional appeal for consumers. Shanzhai companies focus on offering practical functions with good value to meet local consumers' needs and manage their own brand building and recognition. Shanzhai producers may grow quickly to build their own original brands through continuous product feature improvement and innovation (Jiang and Shan, 2016). With this rationale, it is expected that:

H4. Degree of satisfaction has a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward shanzhai products

Attitude as an intermediate variable is considered to be highly correlated with one's intentions, which in turn is a reasonable predictor of behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). One definition of attitude is "... a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993).

The link of attitude-behavioral intentions has been extensively examined in the marketing literature (Jiang and Shan, 2016). According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, attitude is positively correlated with behavioral intentions, which in turn is an antecedent of the real behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). The attitude to behavioral intention link is also tested in our study. In this sense, it is hypothesized that:

H5. Consumers' attitudes toward Shanzhai products lead to their purchase intention

Based on the above arguments, the study postulates a research model that investigates predictors of consumers' attitude toward shanzhai and its purchase intention outcome of the attitude as depicted in Figure 1.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Structural equation model

The studies of this paper are based on the application of the structural equation model. In order to obtain the best-fit behavior intension model, the Amos 17.0 (Analysis of Moment Structure 17.0) was used to construct a series of structural equations to confirm the relationship between four various constructs and attitudes toward shanzhai products through the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) method.

The structural model is designed to test the causal path relationship between the latent variables, mainly aiming at analysis of the path of latent variables for testing the fit nature of the structural model (Wu, 2006; Chen, 2007). This study used Amos 17.0 (Analysis of Moment Structure 17.0) software package to conduct model fittest, to define the model strategy and the causal strength, causal direction, indirect relationship and direct relationship.

Sample and data collection

A survey was conducted among students. They filled out the

questionnaires online and forwarded the links to their friends. Owing to the average low income, students are important user group for shanzhai products, as well as university students will dominate future management positions; their attitudes are important for understanding the future prevalence of software piracy. Besides, filling out the online questionnaire can make up the geographical limitations of the paper questionnaire. The collected IP addresses include 32 cities such as Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, Changchun, Urumqi, Canada, US, and UK. Data were collected from survey questionnaires from June 1 to 18, 2013; then a total of 200 individuals answered the survey instrument and were used for the data analysis.

Measures

Based on the literature, we built the questionnaire using scales that were already validated in previous research. Table 1 summarizes items including the final attitude and behavior intentions, along with price preference, social influence, product attributes and degree of satisfaction. All of the above constructs and items were measured using seven-point Likert scales, with 1 representing "disagree or not important," and 7 representing "agree or important."

Data analysis

In order to achieve the purpose of this study and to test the hypotheses, the SPSS 19.0 and AMOS 17 statistics package programs were used. With SPSS 19.0, descriptive analysis was adopted to find out demographic characteristics of the sample and Principle Axis Factoring was adopted to extract principle factors. Also, Cronbach's α was adopted to test reliability. Using AMOS 17, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to prove the validity of each instrument, while structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses (Table 4).

RESULTS

A survey is conducted among shanzhai consumers in China. They are interviewed in the streets about their perception about shanzhai products; the data are collected on both weekdays and weekend. Researchers trained the interviewers before the survey; the interviewees include consumers with different demographic profile: age, gender, education and income level.

Descriptive analysis

A total of 200 questionnaires were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 100 percent. Of the respondents, 93(47 percent) were females, 106(53 percent) were males, with an average age of 24.26 years. Half of the participants (98 or 49%) affirmed that they had bought a counterfeit product before. From Table 1, the scale items presented means varying from 2.21 (item "I bought shanzhai product that satisfied me") to 6.08 (item "I prefer the product of high price quality inference"). In general, the scale means indicate that respondents manifested low satisfaction of shanzhai products and the

Table 1. Descriptive analysis results.

Scale	Mean	SD
Price preference		
pp1 I'm always a price-sensitive buyer	5.09	1.39
pp2 I prefer the product of high price quality inference	6.08	1.21
Social influence		
si1 Others will admire me	2.49	1.49
si2 Shanzhai prevail in our society	2.46	1.35
Product attributes		
pa1 I appreciate its novelty	3.67	1.56
pa2 I 'm fond of its new function	3.70	1.58
pa3 The price of a product is a good indicator of its quality	3.84	1.64
Degree of satisfaction		
ds1 It has no need to spend high price to buy polity goods	2.47	1.36
ds2 I bought Shanzhai product makes great gratification	2.21	1.34
Attitude toward Shanzhai products (Huang et al., 2004)		
at1 Considering price, I prefer shanzhai	3.06	1.38
at2 I like shopping for shanzhai products	2.64	1.36
at3 There's nothing wrong with purchasing shanzhai products	3.59	1.53
at4 Shanzhai is good for consumers	3.51	1.51
at5 Generally speaking, buying shanzhai is a better choice	3.08	1.44
Behavioral intentions (Zeithaml et al., 1996)		
bi1 I think about a shanzhai product as a choice when buying something	2.79	1.54
bi2 Buying shanzhai product	2.51	1.41
bi3 I will recommend to friends and relatives that they buy a shanzhai product	2.42	1.51

widespread preference for high price quality inference. The other descriptive value is standard deviation varying from 1.211 (item "I prefer the product of high price quality inference") to 1.582 (item "I'm fond of its new function").

The above scale standard deviation shows that price quality inference preference is most stable and new function favorability of shanzhai products is most instable. Due to the data collection process, questionnaire did not present missing values because interviewers instructed and reviewed the surveys all through the process.

Factor analysis

Since factor loadings were all higher than 0.5, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.849; the significance level of Bartlett's Test (χ 2=1759.105, d*f*=120) is 0.000. Therefore, both indicators show that it is appropriate to use factor analysis to uncover the underlying dimensions of all items. But the result of dimensions is not clearly distinctive; confirmatory factor

analysis (CFA) was conducted. A CFA was performed using AMOS 17 on data to further confirm the structural model. Table 2 shows the factor loadings and the Cronbach's α .

Relationships between constructs and items

The first construct relates to price preference. Factor loading of each item was 0.649 and 0.761, with a relative low Cronbach's α of 0.675, and the average variance extracted is 0.5002. The second construct related to items representing influences of other people's attitude and respective is named "social influence". Factor loading is 0.796 and 0.709, with a Cronbach's α of 0.774, and the AVE is 0.568. The third construct represented objective factors of products. Therefore, the third factor is "product attributes". Factor loadings are 0.808, 0.956 and 0.618, and the Cronbach's α is 0.832; AVE is 0.650. The fourth construct describes consumers' attitude toward shanzhai; factor loadings are 0.565, 0.664, 0.668 and 0.674, with a

Item	Price preference	Social influence	Product attributes	Degree of satisfaction	Attitude	Behaviora intentions
pp1	.649					
pp2	.761					
si1		.796				
si2		.709				
pa1			.808			
pa2			.956			
pa3			.618			
ds1				.589		
ds2				.570		
at1					.565	
at2					.664	
at3					.668	
at4					.674	
bi1						.884
bi2						.770
bi3						.825
Cronbach α	0.675	0.774	0.832	0.852	0.855	0.886

Table 2. Factor analysis result.

Total variance explained = 59.03%.

Cronbach's α of 0.855 and AVE of 0.415. The fifth construct represented the purchase gratification, which is defined as "degree of satisfaction". Factor loadings are 0.589 and 0.570, with a higher Cronbach's α of 0.852, and AVE is 0.336. The factor loading of every item in the model is at a significant level (p<0.05). Results show that every item can explain every conduct well.

Reliability and validity

The structural equation model includes price preference, social influence, product attributes, degree of satisfaction, attitude towards shanzhai products and behavior intension. Scales were analyzed in terms of their reliability, by means of the internal consistency (Cronbach's α). After computing the items of each scale, values ranged from 0.675 (price preference) to 0.886 (behavior intension). Discriminant validity was performed by data criteria to test the validity of the fitness with the data: χ2=280.3, d*f*=99, p=0.000, AGFI=0.797, GFI=0.852, NFI=0.846, IFI=0.894, CFI=0.893, RMSEA=0.096 (results using the maximum likelihood). The six constructs were then generally verified. χ^2 parameter was significant (p=0.000), and since $\chi 2$ is sensitive to sample size, relative $\chi 2 (\chi 2/df)$ is commonly suggested in the measurement literature. Using ML method, a value of 2.831 was found for the relative χ^2 , which is in the acceptable level of 2 or 3 to 1 (Arbuckle, 1997).

Structural model

The conceptual model was tested according to Anderson and Gerbing (1988). With the results of the CFA in the prior section, the model was tested by standardized coefficients and other fit statistics. Figure 1 shows the findings. The overall model fit was satisfactory based on reliability and validity test. After overall model fit was approved, hypotheses were tested via structural equation modeling.

Estimation of model parameters

There were five paths in this model. Among the paths, there were four paths between four antecedents and attitudes towards shanzhai products and one path between attitude and behavior intention.

Considering the antecedents of attitudes, significant paths were found for price preference (p<0.089), product attributes (p<0.000), degree of satisfaction (p<0.000) and attitudes towards shanzhai products, supporting H1, H3, H4, H5 respectively. Only social influence was a nonsignificant antecedent (p<0.132), failing to support H2. The result showed that there is no relationship between social influence and attitude toward shanzhai products.

Results also revealed that the attitude toward shanzhai is most significantly affected by the following constructs: degree of satisfaction (β =0.734), product attributes (β =0.242) and price preference (β =0.166). In this order,

Relation	Regression weights	Standard errors	Standardized weights(β)	Critical ratio(t)	Ρ
Attitude←Price preference	.132	.077	.166	1.699	.089
Attitude ← Social influence	.089	.059	.079	1.507	.132
Attitude←Product attributes	.182	.047	.242	3.886	.000
Attitude←Degree of satisfaction	.617	.070	.734	8.777	.000
Behavior intention←Attitude	1.014	.109	.757	9.311	.000

Table 3. Parameter estimation.

these variables are the most important for explaining consumers' attitude toward shanzhai products with regard to standardized weights (β). With regard to the construct social influence, results show that only social influence cannot affect attitude significantly, but also the standardized weights (β =0.079) is the lowest. As a result, it was found that most variables significantly affect attitudes but not social influence. The exogenous latent variable "social influence" including "Others will admire me" and "Shanzhai prevail in our society" did not affect attitude toward shanzhai products. A possible explanation for this non-significant result is 'whether others admire me or not had no influence on customers' decision of purchasing shanzhai product. This finding can also be interpreted as an indication of face issue in China. Since shanzhai might be perceived to be gray marketing or still might be related to counterfeit, people may tend to avoid it because they are afraid of being taken as buying low price products.

When assessing the variables influencing behavioral intentions, it was found that attitude was significant (p=0.000; β =0.757), supporting H5. This result shows the mediating effect of attitude in the relationship between a series of personal, product, social factors and intentions to buy a shanzhai product. In other words, experience and cognition influence attitude, which in turn influences behavior (Table 3).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Although gray market has grown worldwide, research on consumers' demand for counterfeit products has been well documented in previous literature. However, shanzhai has barely received any attention in the consumer study field due to misunderstanding and prejudice. Shanzhai product is different from counterfeit in the sense that shanzhai products provide similar products with its own brand name which is considered legal under trademark laws; nowadays shanzhai continues to innovate new features and interesting additional functions through imitation and innovation. Hence research on counterfeits consumption should not be directly applicable to shanzhai consumption.

The research targeting at the underlying mechanism

of the purchase of shanzhai product remains scarce. In order to fill this void, this paper tries to identify the antecedents and purchase intention consequence of attitude consumers' towards shanzhai products. Specifically, this study examines the effect of the price preference, social influence, product attributes, degree of satisfaction on attitude, and the influence of this attitude on the behavioral intentions of purchasing shanzhai products. The estimation results show that degree of satisfaction (β =0.734), product attributes (β =0.242) and price preference (β =0.166) had positive effects on attitude at a significant level. However, social influence perceived by consumers was non-significantly efficacious to attitude toward shanzhai products which indirectly caused behavior intention.

One contribution of this research is that the findings reveal that consumers who prefer shanzhai are still the price conscious segment of consumers, who are price driven and seek to buy good deal products. With continuous innovation and local adaptation, shanzhai products attract consumers with its additional functional appeal, and even create new features way faster than branded products. This makes shanzhai very attractive to consumers who are price sensitive.

This paper investigates that social influence is not related to attitude. That is to say, shanzhai is not spokesperson of counterfeits, and it would carry on the independent innovation in the end through initial imitation. Another contribution is related to the practical implications of this paper: if shanzhai products want to further develop, they need further innovation and development, and more important is cost reduction; it should use low price strategy since shanzhai products' target consumers are mostly price sensitive consumers.

Managerial implication

This study made several managerial suggestions and implications for the shanzhai manufacturers. First, for most small and rising manufacturers, lack of fund and excellent techniques are big barriers to brand building. In this period, shanzhai is an optional mode for their market penetration. Second, low-cost is one specific advantage of shanzhai, which is effective for Chinese consumers.

Table 4.	Tests	of hypotheses.	
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Hypothesis	Exogenous construct	Endogenous construct	Regression weight	Significance	Finding
1	Price preference	Attitude	0.166	*	Supported
2	Social influence	Attitude	0.079	Non-significant	Not supported
3	Product attribute	Attitude	0.242	*	Supported
4	Degree of satisfaction	Attitude	0.734	*	Supported
5	Attitude	Purchase intention	0.757	*	Supported

Thirdly, to achieve success in shanzhai market in China, many companies first need to hold an appropriate view of Chinese consumers. Chinese consumers in shanzhai prefer the function. low-price, and innovation, but shanzhai cannot bring admiration from other people because it differs from counterfeits. Consumers buy shanzhai not for their similar look like luxury brand, they buy shanzhai for its own shanzhai brand. Fourthly, after having a certain market share, they need further innovation and development of their features and functions. Shanzhai sometimes is a way that consumers try out new function and innovation, especially when shanzhai is accessible in China. At least, for young generation of consumers, product attribute is an important factor in using shanzhai. These companies need to build disruptive innovation and incremental innovation.

And lastly, Chinese shanzhai enterprises transforming to independent innovation brand in the socio-economic transition, as well as increasing shanzhai enterprises' ability of creation, are necessary and critical. Brand building for shanzhai is the sustainable way of management; manufacturers of a true brand should sign a license agreement, so as not to breach the intellectual property rights, create brand value, and generate greater economic benefits.

For the government, we raise suggestions that: (1) Government should relax criteria that companies get access to shanzhai industry, allow markets to play basic function in resource allocations, focus on quality control and after-sales service. (2) Government should support shanzhai companies to build their own brand and provide research and development capital, helping shanzhai industry to grow faster, hopefully to breed more famous national strong brands throughout shanzhai startups

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations and future research directions are as follows. First, most of the studies involved student or young generation participants, who may be more inclined to purchase shanzhai products because of both their financial situation and their greater susceptibility to innovation. However, shanzhai products are not just attractive to low-income consumers. Future study should improve the sample selection and choose broader consumer base.

Second, as an initial effort to evaluate effect of four constructs on behavior intention towards shanzhai, other more factors could also possibly be included and tried to be tested as predictors of the purchase attitude; future study should try other constructs or antecedent variables.

Lastly, this paper points out that the survey focused on general rather than specific shanzhai products and suggests that consideration of different product categories maybe informative. It can also compare shanzhai with counterfeits in regards to influence factors on behavior intention.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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