COUNTERFEIT LUXURY FASHION BRANDS: CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

The act of counterfeiting products has grown at an extraordinary rate within the last two decades and is largely viewed around the world as a social, political and economic issue. Previous research mostly focused on the supply aspects of the counterfeit industry, with little research focusing on consumer demand for such merchandise and even less attention is given to South African consumers' demand and behaviour thereof The purpose of this article was therefore to describe South African consumers' purchase behaviour towards counterfeit luxury fashion branded products. The findings revealed that South African consumers have a relatively low demand and purchase behaviour towards counterfeit luxury fashion branded products and that the trading place is mostly in an informal setting.

Keywords: Luxury Brands, Fashion, Non-Deceptive Counterfeits, Purchase Behaviour, South Africa

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1. Introduction

Counterfeiting has been a reason for major concern over the years and is a trade that continues to thrive in the 21st century. It is also a trade that can be seen to cause many social, political and economic problems (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2009:820). According to the International Anti-counterfeiting Coalition (IACC, n.d.), counterfeiting has grown over 10,000% in the last two decades, which thereby accounts for roughly 5-7% of total world trade. The growth of the counterfeit industry can be attributed to many things, including the major increase in global trade and the continuous development of new markets in the search for higher sales and profits (Phau, Teah & Lee, 2009:3). However, it is noted that counterfeit trade is a problem that is mostly propagated due to consumer demand (Turunen & Laaksenen, 2011:468; IACC, n.d.; Bian & Moutinho, 2011:192).

Multiple studies have investigated the supply aspect of counterfeit trade, but where the literature falls short is research with regard to consumer demand towards counterfeit products (Heike, 2010:160; Penz & Ströttinger, 2005:568), but more so on the demand that consumers of emerging economies have towards counterfeit products. This article therefore aims to describe the South African consumers' behaviour towards the purchase of counterfeit luxury fashion branded products.

The following section outlines the aim and objective of the article and provides a brief background into the global counterfeit problem. Thereafter counterfeit issues arising in Africa and more specifically South Africa are discussed. Finally the research methodology is discussed followed by the results, limitations and conclusion of the study.

2. Aim and Objective of the Research

The purpose of this article was to investigate the purchase behaviour of South African consumers towards counterfeit luxury fashion branded products. In order to ascertain the aim of the research, the following objective was formulated;

- To describe South African consumers' purchase behaviour towards counterfeit luxury fashion brands.

3. Litrature Review

3.1 The counterfeit market

Brands are arguably one of the most valued assets a company can own, as they are the result of years of developmental efforts and can be seen as being the value of a firm (Green & Smith, 2002:89). Successful brands can generally charge a premium for their branded products as they have gained the trust of the consumer in that their products may be perceived as offering better quality, style, features and service (Bian & Moutinho, 2009:368). Branded products are furthermore important to consumers as they create a sense of achievement and promote individual identity (O'Cass & Frost, 2002:67). According to Penz and Ströttinger (2005:568) counterfeit products would not exist in the market was it not for well established brands and the fact that they can normally charge a premium for it. In essence the more a firm seems to invest in generating and improving its image to create a successful brand, the more prone the brand will be to counterfeit activities (Commuri, 2009:86; Triandewi & Tjiptono, 2013:23).

The act of counterfeiting is believed to be as old as markets themselves (Haie-Fayle & Hübner, 2007), and is a trade that was at first relatively unnoticed (Heike, 2010:159), however, as time moved on, the industry has grown exponentially to be a serious problem globally, occurring both in developed and developing countries (Ergin, 2010:181). Counterfeiting, or the counterfeit trade, can be described as the "…production and sale of fake products, which seem identical to the original product" (Penz & Ströttinger, 2005:568). Counterfeiting is not limited to any specific type of product, but is found across all product categories (Bian & Veloutsou, 2007:212; Ang, Cheng, Lim & Tambyah, 2001:221). According to Penz and Ströttinger (2005:568), counterfeiters generally prey on companies that have a high brand image and those products which have a simple method of production. Luxury fashion branded products which are generally easy to manufacture is one market that have been hit hard by counterfeit traders, as it is an industry that has experienced phenomenal growth (Phau, Teah & Lee, 2009:3; Kim & Karpova, 2010:79; Phau, Sequeira & Dix, 2009:262), as these products have instant global recognition (Juggessur & Cohen, 2009:383), they are easy to sell, the manufacturing costs are fairly low, and they are products that the consumers are looking for to enhance their status and their desire to be in tune with latest fashions (Phau & Teah, 2009:15).

Counterfeiting from the perspective of a consumer can appear in two different forms, namely deceptive (blur) and non-deceptive counterfeiting (Bian & Moutinho, 2011:193; Hanzaee & Taghipourian, 2012:1147). Deceptive (blur) counterfeits are when consumers unknowingly purchase a fake or copy of an authentic product, in this instance the consumer cannot be held accountable for his/her purchase action as they were of the opinion that it was the authentic product (Penz & Ströttinger, 200:568; Bian & Moutinho, 2011:193; Heike, 2010:161), whereas non-deceptive counterfeit products are instances in which the consumer knowingly purchases a counterfeit product (Heike, 2010:161). Non-deceptive counterfeiting is therefore the focus of the research as according to Bian and Moutinho (2011:193), it is only under the non-deceptive purchase condition that consumer's perceptions of counterfeit products will imitate their demand. Hanzaee and Taghipourian (2012:1147) further state that the purchase of luxury brands is particularly rampant when it comes to non-deceptive purchase behaviour. Therefore, this article focuses on consumers' demand towards non-deceptive luxury fashion branded products.

3.2 Sources of counterfeit products: Issues arising in Africa

Counterfeit products can be traced all around the world, but what has become very apparent is that counterfeiting is particularly widespread in Asia (Ang, Cheng, Lim & Tambyah, 2001:221). According to Bian and Veloutsou (2007:213) and Phau and Teah (2009:15), China is infamously known to be one of the major producers of counterfeit products and is the country where the majority of counterfeits can be traced. Bian and Veloutsou (2007:213) indicate that China exports counterfeits globally to Europe, Russia, the Middle East and the United States of America thus indicating that their target markets are vast.

Africa however according to Haman (2010), was always looked at as merely a destination for counterfeit products and therefore anti-counterfeiting strategies were rather prioritised to Europe, America and Asia. Consequently very little of the resource allocation was directed to Africa to combat the counterfeit dilemma. Africa, however, can no longer merely be viewed as a destination for counterfeit merchandise (Haman, 2010), as according to Meissner (2010) a new trend in the eyes of illicit traders has arisen, whereby Africa is being utilised as a "transit route". Through utilising Africa, counterfeits are rerouted to disguise the producer's country of origin (Meissner, 2010; Haman, 2010:344). This process has been made easier due to the increased trade between Africa and China, the lack of efficient border controls and the fact that African governments generally do not share information with regard to fake goods, and lastly many African consumers do not regard the trafficking of counterfeit merchandise to be a serious crime (Meissner, 2010).

A further core factor to Africa's counterfeit problem, according to Haman (2010:345), is that of socio-economic factors, whereby poverty and unemployment guarantee that there are enough individuals that need to make a living by any means

necessary, which consequently means that individuals could be subject to trading directly or indirectly with counterfeit goods in order to support themselves and their families.

3.3 Counterfeit Trade: A South African Perspective

Like all other global markets, South Africa is no exception to counterfeit trade. Le Cordeur (2012) indicates that counterfeiting of merchandise in South Africa is however a relatively new problem. The reason pertaining to South Africa's late arrival to the counterfeit arena is most likely due to the countries past political isolation. Post political isolation however, South African borders have become more penetrable and trade relationships have been established whereby well-known brands have become more available in the country, thereby making South African consumers more brand aware of global offerings (Le Cordeur, 2012).

According to the South African Institute for Intellectual Property Law (SAIIPL, n.d.), South Africa has recently been targeted by counterfeiters as a "dumping ground" and "transit route" whereby heightened interest towards the country is due to the fact that the country is not land locked like other African countries and the country has many ports which can be used to off load illicit merchandise (Haman, 2010:345). Reasons for the growth of this trade, according to Ramara and Lamont (2012), is that counterfeiting activities in South Africa is regarded as a victimless offense, and one that is viewed as a chance to get a desired branded product at a far lower price to that of the authentic product.

According to Magwaza (2012) South Africa has seen a steady increase in the number of hawkers selling counterfeit clothing products resulting in jobs as well as revenue for clothing manufacturers being lost. Ramara and Lamont (2012) indicate that in 2010 a projected 14,400 South Africans lost their jobs in the textile industry as a result of counterfeit clothing being imported. Magwaza (2012) indicates that, in the 2011 financial year, 20,000 seizures were made by the South African revenue service amounting to a value of R1 billion, with 750,000 pieces of clothing being seized to the value of R483 million. This high value of goods seized is a strong indication that there is a demand for counterfeit goods in the country. Therefore, a deeper investigation into consumers' demand for luxury fashion branded products was regarded as appropriate and therefore this study commenced.

3.4 Consumer behaviour towards counterfeit luxury fashion brands

Many consumers worldwide and maybe more so in emerging economies, do not mind purchasing counterfeit products especially those consumers who want to be fashionable but do not have the means to afford it. A look-a-like product allows these consumers to experience the popularity associated with the product and its status as a well-established brand (Triandewi & Tjiptono, 2013:23).

Consumer behaviour can be defined, according to Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2010:6), as "… the study of individuals, groups, or organisations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society." In today's rapidly changing, dynamic and competitive market environment it is imperative that an organisation gain an understanding of the customers they are catering for in order to survive and succeed. Marketers need to know anything and everything about their customers, for example what they think, want and how they spend their money (Schiffman, Kanuk & Wisenblit, 2010:23; Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2007:6). By understanding their customers' behaviour, organisations can gain a competitive advantage as they can predict future needs and wants of consumers and thus create tailored products or services to meet future needs, which consumers have yet to apprehend (Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012:7).

Consequently in order for luxury fashion branded organisations to survive and/or remain successful, a comprehensive understanding of an individual's behaviour towards the purchase of counterfeit products is needed to formulate more effective marketing strategies (Bian & Moutinho, 2011:193).

4. Methodlogy

In order to ascertain the primary objective of the study, a comprehensive methodology needed to be set forth. First secondary data was reviewed through the perusal of academic articles, textbooks and the internet.

Due to consumer sensitivity to the admittance of past and intentional counterfeit purchase behaviour the empirical aspect of the research was administered to respondents via two web-based self-administered questionnaires. The preliminary questionnaire comprised of ten questions whereby, five questions were filter close-ended questions and five questions were open-ended to determine past purchase behaviour with counterfeit brands. Once past purchase behaviour had been identified and specific brands stated, these brands were then incorporated into the main research instrument which described consumer purchase behaviour and demand towards counterfeit luxury fashion branded products.

The main research instrument then comprised of nine close-ended questions. Past purchase behaviour was measured by asking respondents five multiple-choice single response questions relating to specific brands. Intention to purchase counterfeit luxury

fashion branded products was asked by means of a five-point Likert type scale, whereby responses ranged from "Strongly no" to "Strongly yes".

The respondents asked to complete the questionnaires were university going students registered for either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. Two samples were established through a probability stratified sampling approach; the first sample was set in place in order to ascertain the past purchased counterfeit luxury fashion brands, whereby the second sample then administered the main research instrument with the incorporated past purchased brands in order to describe consumer purchase behaviour and demand. This sampling approach was deemed most appropriate as the researcher had access to a list of registered students.The samples were derived from the provinces of Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal as

these are areas that have been identified as provinces within South Africa that have the highest rate of counterfeit occurrence and are economic hubs within the country (SAFACT, n.d.; Naidu, 2005). Data collection took place from June-August 2012, whereby 175 responses were obtained for the preliminary survey and a total of 303 for the main research instrument. The research findings are discussed in the next section.

5. Reseach Findings

5.1 Research Findings

Table 1 below represents the demographic make-up of the respondents who answered the main research instrument.

Table 1. Demographic composition of respondents (Rounded off to the nearest percentage)

Demographic characteristic	Respondents (n)	Percentage
Age		
18-24	86	28%
25-29	77	25%
30-34	53	18%
35-39	33	11%
40 < x	53	18%
Gender		
Male	160	53%
Female	143	47%
Race		
Black	88	29%
White	147	49%
Coloured	38	13%
Indian	28	9%
Province		
Gauteng	115	38%
KwaZulu-Natal	54	18%
Western Cape	133	44%
Socio-economic class		
Low	41	13%
Middle	233	77%
Upper	29	10%

It is evident from table 1 above that the majority of respondents fell in the age group of 18–24 years (28%, 86 respondents) while the minority of respondents were 35-39 years (33, 11%). The results emanating for gender indicated that roughly 53 percent (160) of respondents were male and 47 percent (143) were female. This division can broadly be seen to be in line with set strata and relatively in line with the national average figures for gender. The results obtained for race indicate that the majority of respondents were white (49%, 147 respondents) while a mere 9 percent 28 respondents) of respondents were Indian. In terms of provincial make-up respondents came mostly from the Western Cape (44%, 133

respondents) whereby the minority of respondents came from KwaZulu-Natal (18%, 54 respondents). In terms of socio-economic class the majority of consumers fell in the middle class (77%, 233 respondents) while only 10 percent (29 respondents) considered themselves to be in an upper class.

5.2 Past purchase behaviour of South African consumers towards counterfeit luxury fashion branded products: Preliminary survey

The preliminary survey was used to determine the most popularly purchased counterfeit luxury fashion

brands that South African consumers had purchased in the past. The following were identified to be the most purchased counterfeit brands: Gucci and Rolex (Watches), Ray Ban (Sunglasses); Nike (Apparel/Clothing), Louis Vuitton and Prada (Leather and leather accessories) and Nike (Shoes). These brands were captured in the main research instrument that was sent to a second sample in order to describe the South African consumers purchase behaviour towards counterfeit luxury fashion brands.

5.3 Past purchase behaviour

The main research instrument determined whether respondents had ever purchased the counterfeit luxury fashion branded products as per the identified brands derived from the preliminary survey. The responses received were as follows:

Table 2. Past purchase of identified counterfeit luxury fashion brands (n = 303)

Brand	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Watch: Gucci and Rolex	23	8	280	92	303	100
Sunglasses: Ray Ban	54	18	249	82	303	100
Apparel/Clothing: Nike	75	25	228	75	303	100
Leather and leather accessories: Louis Vuitton and Prada	34	11	269	89	303	100
Shoes: Nike	48	16	255	84	303	100

From table 2 above it can be seen that only a few individuals indicated a past purchase behaviour towards counterfeit merchandise in the fashion brands and product categories identified. In the watches category only 8 percent (n = 23) indicated that they had a past counterfeit purchase behaviour with regard to Gucci or Rolex watches, while 18 percent (n = 54) indicated a past counterfeit purchase behaviour towards Ray Ban sunglasses. 25 percent (n = 75) of respondents indicated a past purchase behaviour towards counterfeit Nike apparel/clothing, while 11 percent (n = 34) indicated a past purchase behaviour of Louis Vuitton and Prada counterfeit leather and leather accessories. Lastly, Nike received a 16 percent (n = 48) past purchase behaviour for counterfeit shoes. From these figures it is clear that not many South African consumers had previously purchased the specific brands in the stated product categories.

5.4 Purchase intention towards counterfeit luxury fashion branded products

All respondents were requested to indicate their intentional purchase behaviour towards counterfeit brands. The following results obtained are viewed in figure 1 below:
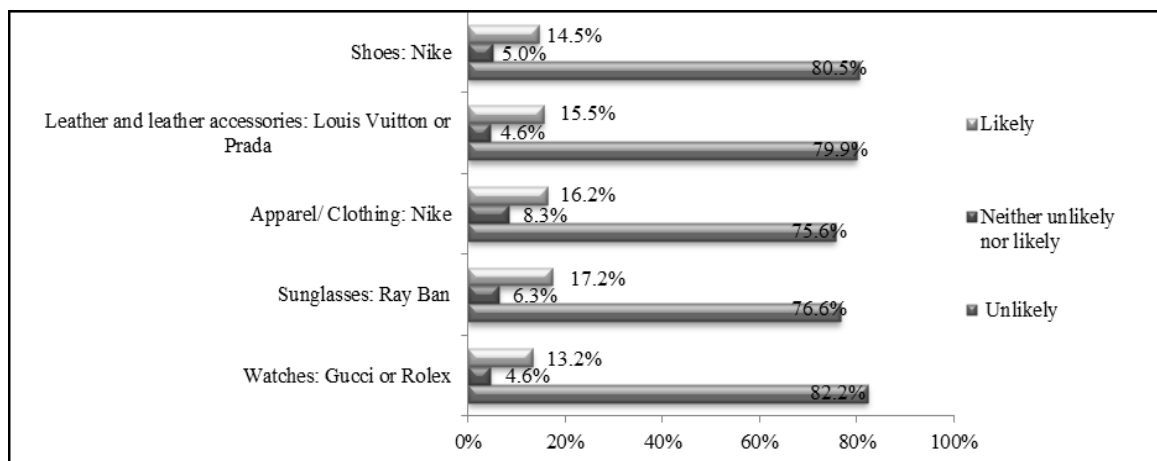

Figure 1. Purchase intention towards counterfeit luxury fashion branded products (n = 303)

From figure 1 above it can be seen that respondents had a low intention towards the purchase of counterfeit watches (Gucci or Rolex) with 82.2 percent indicating that they were unlikely to purchase the counterfeit product. Strong unlikeliness followed for the remaining product categories: Ray Ban sunglasses (76.6%), Nike apparel/clothing (75.6%), Louis Vuitton or Prada leather and leather accessories (79.9%) and Nike shoes (80.5%). These figures therefore indicate a low intention towards the purchase of the specified counterfeit luxury fashion brands from South African consumers.

5.5 *Annual amount spent on counterfeit luxury fashion branded products*

The yearly amount spent on counterfeit luxury fashion branded products is indicated in figure 2 below.
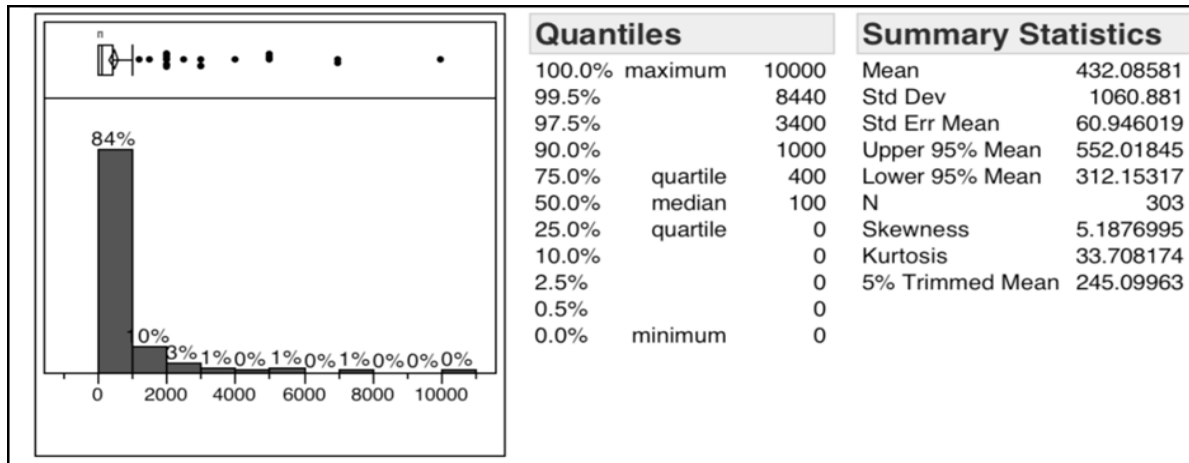
Quantiles			Summary Statistics	
100.0%	maximum	10000	Mean	432.08581
99.5%		8440	Std Dev	1060.881
97.5%		3400	Std Err Mean	60.946019
90.0%		1000	Upper 95% Mean	552.01845
75.0%	quartile	400	Lower 95% Mean	312.15317
50.0%	median	100	N	303
25.0%	quartile	0	Skewness	5.1876995
10.0%		0	Kurtosis	33.708174
2.5%		0	5% Trimmed Mean	245.09963
0.5%		0		
0.0%	minimum	0		

Figure 2. Annual rand spent on counterfeit luxury fashion branded products (n = 303)

It is clear from figure 2 above that the average yearly amount spent on counterfeit luxury fashion branded products among the 303 respondents amounted to R432,09. From the standard deviation, however (R1 060,88), it can be seen that there is a large difference in the spending patterns of lower and top-end spenders. Hence, there is a skewed distribution towards the lower end figures of R0–R1 000, where 90 percent of respondents purchased within this expenditure range. However, from the entire sample 75 percent indicated that their expenditure was between R0 and R400. In order to counteract this skewed distribution and to establish average rand spent the median score of R100 was considered to be most accurate. In order to gain a deeper understanding into the consumer spending patterns; cross tabulations were conducted with the samples demographic variables. Table 3 below indicates the average amount spent per age group with regards to purchasing counterfeit luxury fashion branded products:

Table 3. Average counterfeit spent per age group

		Age group				
		18-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40+
Spend counterfeit	Mean	R502,34	R393,25	R620,96	R134,24	R332,08
	StdDev	R1 227,90	R935,21	R1 355,20	R264,04	R847,80

From table 3 above it is clear that the highest rand spent per annum came from respondents aged 30-34 years, whereby the amount spent per annum was averaged to be R620.96. The lowest amount spent on counterfeits came from the 35-39 year old age group (R134.24). Amount spent per gender per annum is indicated in table 4 below:

Table 4. Average amount spent per gender

		Gender	
		Male	Female
Spend counterfeit	Mean	R510,26	R344,62
	StdDev	R1 284,60	R728,86

Table 4 above illustrates the annual amount spent per gender, whereby it can be seen that males scored higher in terms of amount spent on counterfeit products with an annual average expenditure of R510.26 in comparison to female consumers' average expenditure of R344.62. Table 5 below represents the results obtained for consumers annual rand spent on counterfeits in relation to racial grouping:

Table 5. Average amount spent per racial group

		Race group			
		Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Spend counterfeit	Mean	R622,51	R307,97	R344,74	R598,93
	StdDev	R1 313,00	R723,09	R504,41	R1 896,70

From table 5 it is evident that Black South African consumers had the highest annual counterfeit expenditure (R622.51) with White South African consumers spending the least on counterfeit goods annually (R307.97). Table 6 below brings to light consumer expenditure per province:

Table 6. Average amount spent per province

		Province		
		Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Western Cape
Spend counterfeit	Mean	R576,54	R199,81	R404,74
	StdDev	R1 398,30	R315,42	R896,59

The results obtained in table 6 above indicate that the highest amount consumers spent on counterfeit products came from consumers residing in the Gauteng area (R576.54) with the least average amount spent per annum coming from KwaZulu-Natal (R199.81). This finding is in line with the information provided by SAFACT (n.d.), whereby they indicate that due to Gauteng being a dominant province in the South African economy it is thus a very lucrative market to counterfeit trade, followed by the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

5.6 Places of counterfeit product purchase

Respondents indicated where they had previously purchased counterfeit merchandise from. The results obtained can be viewed in figure 3 below.
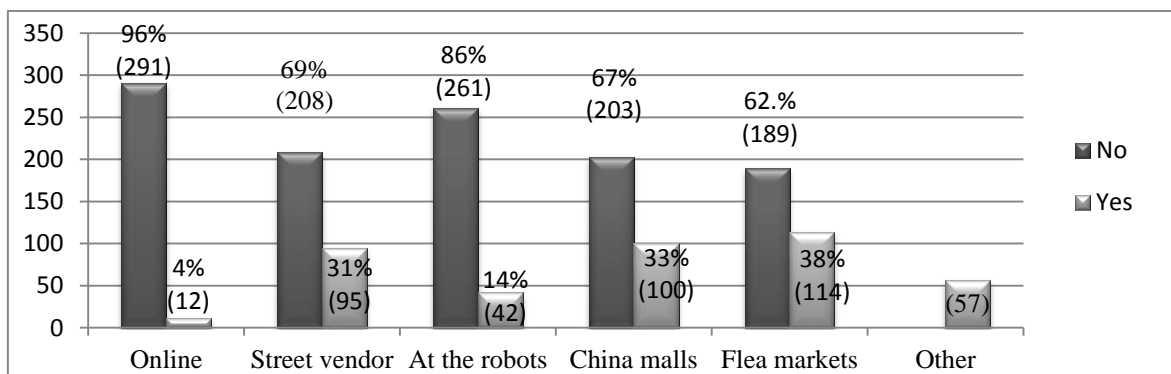

Figure 3. Location of counterfeit purchase

From figure 3 above, it is observed that consumers surveyed could purchase counterfeit products from various places (note that individuals could provide multiple responses). From the graphic representation (figure 3) it can be deduced that the majority of counterfeit trade purchases were made at flea markets (38%, 114 responses), followed by China malls (33%, 100 responses) and street vendors (31%, 95 responses). The identification of counterfeit location should therefore be a starting point to eradicate the counterfeit trade within South African borders.

6. Limitations

One of the core limitations of the study is that respondents might not have been completely honest in their answers due to the action of counterfeit purchase being an actionable offense, despite guaranteed anonymity of the research. Other limitations of the study include:

• The sample was made up of respondents residing in the South African provinces of Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal as these are the areas where most counterfeits are said to be propagated (Naidu, 2005; SAFACT, n.d.), future research might wish to extend the sample size to gain a more holistic view of the South African demand for counterfeit luxury fashion branded products.

- The sample size was taken from individuals that were studying formal degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate students) therefore other less educated or more educated consumers might have differentpast purchase behaviour and intentions to purchase.

- The specific brands identified in the preliminary survey may have skewed results to some degree, since there may have been brands which few respondents did not favour.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The rapid growth of the counterfeit goods market poses a huge threat to many individuals and organisations all around the world (Ha & Lennon, 2006:297). Many factors have been seen to contribute to the growth of the industry, however, quintessentially the industry would not be there if it were not for the demand by consumers (Bian & Moutinho, 2009:368; Phau, Teah & Lee, 2009:3; Turunen & Laaksenen, 2011:468; IACC, n.d.). Therefore, consumers' demand and behaviour towards the purchase of counterfeit luxury fashion branded products in South Africa was investigated.

One of the core findings emanating from the research is that South African consumers have a relatively low purchase behaviour and demand towards counterfeit luxury fashion branded products, however, like in most countries a demand does exist. From the research findings it is seen that South African consumers spend an average of R100 on counterfeit luxury fashion branded products per annum. Upon closer perusal, however, it is seen that the most expenditure per annum per age group was found to be 30-34 year old respondents; results for most expenditure per annum per gender indicated that male consumers evidently spend more on counterfeit brands than female respondents; most expenditure per racial grouping was found to be Black individuals; and that most expenditure per annum per province was from respondents residing in Gauteng. The fact that Gauteng scored the most in terms of amount spent on counterfeit products per annum did not come as a surprise, as Gauteng is the biggest economic hub within the South African economy which therefore makes it a prime target market for illicit traders.

Findings further indicated that the highest scoring location for counterfeit purchase was flea markets, China malls and street vendors. From these findings it is recommended that authorities look to these locations to try to minimise counterfeit luxury fashion branded product dissemination within South African borders, this could be done by conducting regular store investigations within these locations. Furthermore, to limit street vendor counterfeit dissemination it is recommended that the South African government provide trading space to street vendors with stricter penalties on individuals that trade on the street, this will allow authorities to control counterfeit activity and even minimise or even

eliminate it, this will also minimise the danger that street vendors face when selling merchandise in the streets and will further reduce the risk of motorists having accidents as a result of street vendors at traffic lights. From the organisations that provide authentic merchandise to South Africa, it is recommended that they launch anti-counterfeit campaigns so that consumers are made further aware of the detrimental effects counterfeit activities cause. It is lastly recommended that government authorities share information to neighbouring African countries with regard to counterfeit activities in order to create awareness and also for government authorities to collaborate further with other African countries to try to limit the spread.

In order to understand the South African consumers' demand further, it is recommended that future research be done to compare authentic to counterfeit purchase behaviour and to furthermore delve deeper into what causes South African consumers to purchase counterfeit luxury fashion branded products (factors); an identification of such factors could prove beneficial to the field.

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