

Why Consumers Choose Counterfeits: An Integrated Model of Psychological and Social Determinants

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Abstract

Counterfeit consumption has become a global issue that undermines intellectual property rights, damages brand equity, and influences consumer behavior across markets. This study aims to analyze the behavioral characteristics influencing consumers' purchase decisions for counterfeit products, particularly within the Indonesian context. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Neutralization Theory, and Perceived Value Theory as analytical frameworks, the research investigates how attitudes, social influence, novelty seeking, status consumption, brand consciousness, perceived risk, and personal integrity shape purchase intentions. A quantitative survey of 240 Indonesian consumers who have purchased or been exposed to counterfeit products was conducted, and data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0. The findings reveal that attitude, social influence, novelty seeking, and brand consciousness have significant positive effects on counterfeit purchase intention, while perceived risk and integrity exhibit weaker or negative effects. Awareness mediates these relationships, reducing purchase likelihood when ethical and legal knowledge is high. The study contributes theoretically by extending TPB with psychological and social-value constructions and offers managerial implications for policy, education, and anti-counterfeiting strategies.

Keywords: purchase decision, consumer behavior, counterfeit products.

INTRODUCTION

Counterfeit products are a global phenomenon with severe economic, ethical, and social implications. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) reported that global trade in counterfeit and pirated goods reached USD 467 billion in 2021, representing 2.3% of world imports (OECD-EUIPO, 2024). Similarly, Corsearch (2024) projected that counterfeit trade will rise to USD 1.79 trillion by 2030, accounting for nearly 5% of total global trade. The top counterfeit categories include apparel, footwear, luxury accessories, electronics, and cosmetics, reflecting consumers' persistent demand for branded yet affordable alternatives.

A 2023 international consumer survey covering 17 countries found that over 55% of respondents knowingly purchased counterfeit items, with fashion products such as handbags, shoes, and watches being the most common (A-CAPP Center, 2023). This behavior is not confined to low-income consumers; even middle-class buyers, motivated by prestige and

social signaling, participate in counterfeit consumption when authenticity becomes secondary to social appearance (Fahlevi, Giorgyna, & Sinambela, 2024).

From a scientific perspective, the persistence of counterfeit consumption presents behavioral paradox consumers consciously engage in illegal or unethical purchasing despite awareness of its risks and implications. Classical economic theory, which assumes rational decision-making based on price utility maximization, cannot adequately explain this phenomenon (Avci, 2024). Instead, behavioral science suggests that psychological, social, and cultural dynamics play a dominant role in shaping these irrational choices.

Empirical studies demonstrate that consumers often experience cognitive dissonance a psychological discomfort arising from inconsistency between moral beliefs and actual purchasing behavior (Rahman & Ha-Brookshire, 2023). To resolve this dissonance, individuals employ rationalization or neutralization techniques, such as denying harm or shifting responsibility (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Shu, Gino, & Bazerman, 2011). These mechanisms enable consumers to justify counterfeit consumption without perceiving themselves as unethical.

From a social standpoint, the influence of peer validation and digital communities amplifies the normalization of counterfeit purchasing. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Shopee Live have transformed counterfeit buying into a social trend where imitation is sometimes interpreted as self-expression or defiance against corporate elitism (A-CAPP Center, 2023; Firdaus & Soepatini, 2024). Studies indicate that such social contagion effects significantly weaken consumers' moral resistance (Mayasari et al., 2022).

In emerging markets like Indonesia, the counterfeit industry has expanded through e-commerce platforms and social media, where sellers easily distribute replicas that mimic global brands. The Indonesian Anti-Counterfeiting Society (MIAP, 2023) estimates national losses exceeding IDR 300 trillion annually, primarily from counterfeit apparel, footwear, and software. Fashion items remain the most purchased counterfeit category, driven by symbolic motives of self-expression and prestige (Mayasari et al., 2022).

Despite legal frameworks such as Law No. 20 of 2016 on Trademarks and Geographical Indications, enforcement remains weak. Many consumers rationalize purchasing counterfeit goods as harmless, creating cognitive dissonance between moral values and economic rationality. Scholars argue that this phenomenon cannot be explained solely by price sensitivity; psychological, cultural, and social dimensions are equally important (Samaddar, Mondal, & Gandhi, 2024).

The current research seeks to analyze consumer behavioral factors influencing counterfeit purchase decisions in Indonesia. It integrates major theoretical perspectives TPB, SDT, Neutralization Theory, and Perceived Value Theory to explain the underlying motivations and justifications for counterfeit consumption. The study aimed to analyze customer behavior in making counterfeit goods purchasing decisions to determine the most affecting factor in counterfeit goods purchasing decisions. In this study, the factors analyzed were social, cultural, psychological, and personal factors.

Several previous studies have examined the factors that influence the decision to purchase counterfeit goods. Patiro and Sihombing (2023) found that expanding the Theory of Planned Behavior by including value consciousness and past behavior can significantly predict the intention to purchase counterfeit products, supporting the role of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in the context of counterfeit consumption.

Additionally, a study by Mayasari et al. (2022) in Indonesia showed that attitudes toward counterfeit goods are influenced by personal values such as novelty seeking, status consumerism, and information vulnerability, emphasizing the importance of social and personal factors in purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, research by Firdaus and Soepatini (2024) uses Neutralization Theory to understand how consumers justify the purchase of counterfeit goods, showing that moral neutralization techniques contribute to attitudes and intentions to purchase counterfeit goods in Indonesia.

Ajzen's (1991) TPB posits that behavior is determined by behavioral intention, which stems from attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of counterfeit products, attitude reflects the individual's positive or negative evaluation of buying fakes; subjective norms represent social approval; and perceived behavioral control reflects ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. Numerous studies confirm that TPB effectively predicts counterfeit purchase intentions (Avci, 2024; Fahlevi et al., 2024).

According to Mowen & Minor (2007), purchasing decision includes the process undergone by customers in recognizing issues, searching for solutions, evaluating alternatives, and selecting between their purchasing selections. Based on this definition, it can be concluded that purchasing decision is an action of customers to purchase products or services to fulfill their needs or desires.

Purchasing decision is one of the stages of consumer behavior that forms the basis for a consumer to make a purchase decision before post-purchase behavior and how individuals, groups of organizations choose, buy, use and how products or services can provide satisfaction to consumer wants and needs (Ernawati, R., Dwi, A. B., & Argo, J. G., 2021).

Previous research conducted by (Arif et al., 2021) stated that purchasing decisions are a process of making decisions that are initially based on identifying the problem and then evaluating and deciding on the product that best suits consumer needs. In research (Dhestantya, 2018) it is explained that purchasing decisions are a reason for how consumers make choices about purchasing a product that is in accordance with their needs, desires and expectations so that it can lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product which is influenced by several factors including family, price, experience and product quality.

According to Griffin in Sangadji, E.M., & Sopiah. (2013), customer behavior is all activities, actions, and psychological processes encouraging the action before purchasing, when purchasing, using, and finishing products and services after executing the activities mentioned above or evaluation activity.

Suryani, (2012) asserted that culture is a thorough complex covering knowledge, beliefs, arts, law, morals, habits, and other capabilities mastered by individuals as society members. In the cultural comprehension context and its effect on customer behavior, culture is defined as overall beliefs, values, and habits learned by a particular community group that helps direct customer behavior. According to Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2009), "cultural factors have extensive and deep effects on purchasing behavior, where cultural factors include cultures, sub-cultures, and social classes."

Social factors are a group of people simultaneously considering similarities in the status or formal and informal community tribute (Lamb et al., 2001). Social factors can be observed from relationships with friends, families, and parents affecting purchasing decisions. The higher the relationships with friends, families, and parents, the higher the customer's decision to conduct purchases. Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2009) stated that customer behavior is influenced by social factors such as reference groups, family, role, and status.

One's psychological condition is influenced by many things. Following Allport in Carapedia, psychology is "individual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors influenced by the actual, imagined, or indirect presence of others," while Titchener and Wundt in Carapedia asserted that "Psychological is a human experience that is learned from the personal point of view of the experience." According to Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2009), one's purchasing

decision is affected by four primary psychological factors, i.e., motivation, perception, learning, and belief and attitude.

Personal factor is the way to collect and group reaction consistency of an individual against the current situation (Lamb et al., 2001). One's behavior in purchasing something is affected by the personality factors of the customer. Personal factor combines psychological order and environmental factors, including characters and the basis of a person, particularly their dominant characteristics. Although personality is a valuable concept in examining customer behavior, several marketers believe that personality affects the types and brands of purchased products. Personal factor is a condition where a person can determine their decisions according to their desire without coercion from other parties. Kotler (2005) argued that customers' decision is affected by personal characteristics. These characteristics include age, life cycle stage, occupation, economic situation, lifestyle, personality, and buyer self-concept.

Counterfeit products are illegally sold using branded names or designs. The products offered are like famous products with more affordable prices than genuine products. Commonly counterfeited products are those from big brands, such as shoes from Luis Vuitton, Supreme, Nike, and Adidas (Tamara, 2019). Customers might purchase counterfeit products because (Phau, Sequeira, & Dix, 2009).

a. Symbolism and prestige

Symbolism and prestige are vital in deliberately affecting customers to purchase counterfeit luxury products.

b. The short life cycle of fashion products (such as clothes, bags, shoes, and accessories) makes customers avoid spending much money. The mode cycle is short and will be considered out of date shortly after.

c. The success of counterfeit luxury products is related to the price profit offered against genuine products. Also, customers with middle income are interested in purchasing counterfeit luxury products.

Recent global studies have deepened understanding of counterfeit behavior. The A-CAPP (2023) global survey revealed that younger consumers are more accepting of counterfeits due to social media influence and peer endorsement. In Indonesia, Mayasari et al. (2022) confirmed that novelty seeking, status consumption, and brand consciousness significantly affect attitudes toward counterfeit fashion products. Similarly, Avcı (2024) found that materialism and sense of shame influence intention through attitude mediation, underscoring the moral dimension of counterfeit purchasing.

The proposed framework integrates behavioral, psychological, and social variables. The following hypotheses are examined:

H1: Culture is estimated to affect purchase decision

H2: Social is estimated to affect purchase decision

H3: Psychology is estimated to affect purchase decision

H4: Personality is estimated to affect purchase decision.

METHOD

This research adopts a quantitative explanatory design using survey data. The population includes Indonesian consumers familiar with counterfeit goods. The study emphasizes fashion categories (handbags, apparel, footwear), as these dominate counterfeit trade both online and offline.

A total of 240 respondents aged 18–40 was recruited using purposive random sampling via online questionnaires distributed on social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, Shopee

Live). Respondents confirmed awareness or prior purchase of counterfeit products. Ethical approval was secured before data collection.

All constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales adapted from previous validated studies:

Table 1. Variables Measurements

Variables	Indicators
Purchasing Decision (Y)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Issue/Need Recognition b. Information Searching c. Alternative Evaluation d. Purchasing Decision e. Post-Purchasing Behavior
Culture (X1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Culture b. Sub-Culture c. Social Class
Social (X2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reference Group b. Family c. Role and status
Psychology (X3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Motivation b. Perception c. Learning process
Personal (X4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Occupation b. Lifestyle c. Personality and self-concept

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 for Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The method was chosen for its suitability with complex models and smaller sample sizes. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples assessed path coefficients and significance (Hair et al., 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Evaluation

Based on the results of data processing using SmartPLS software, the following results were obtained:

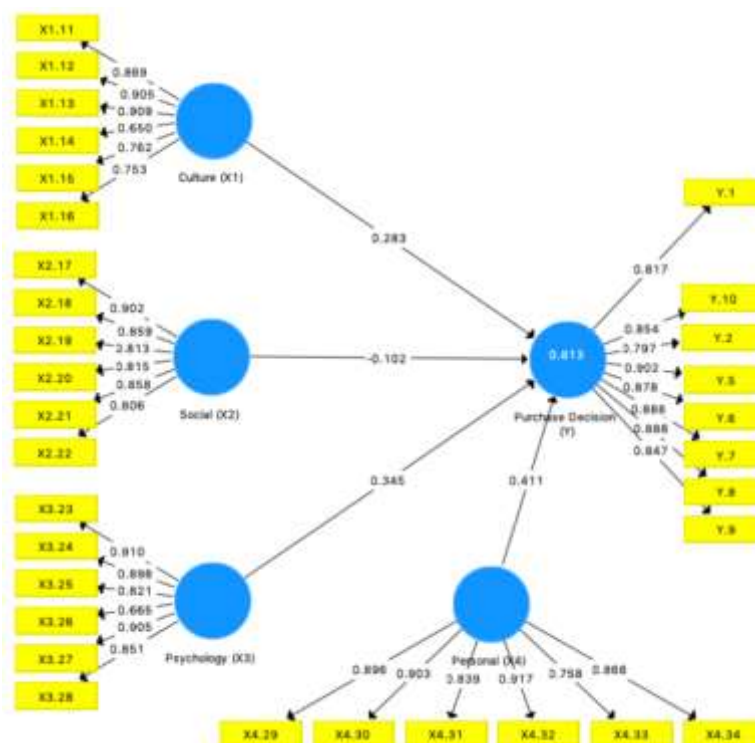


Figure 1. Outer Model

All constructs achieved satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78\text{--}0.91$) and convergent validity (AVE > 0.5). Discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion confirmed that each construct was distinct.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model yielded an R^2 of 0.813 for purchase intention, indicating that 81% of its variance was explained by the independent variables. The bootstrapping results are summarized below:

Tabel 2. T-Statistical Test Results

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistic (O/STDEV)	P Value
Culture (X1) → Purchase Decision Y)	0.283	2.792	0.005
Social (X2) → Purchase Decision (Y)	-0.102	1.664	0.095
Psychology (X3) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.345	1.993	0.047
Personal (X4) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.411	2.359	0.019

Based on the t-statistical result table, the culture variable testing result on purchasing decision had an original sample value of 0.23. This number shows that the culture variable positively impacted purchasing decisions. Furthermore, the t-statistic value revealed that t-calculation $2.792 > t\text{-table } 1.992$. Hence, cultural factors affected purchasing decision with a significance value (p-value) of $0.005 < 0.100$. From this result, H1 was accepted. The study result demonstrated that cultural factors affected purchasing decisions. A predecessor study supporting this result was carried out by Hudani (2020), showing that cultural factors could encourage customers to make purchases involving cultures, sub-cultures, and social classes. Novel internet-based communication technology has generated extensive, hard-to-predict, and annoying cultural effects that transform human relationship dynamics. At the individual

level, changes in views, attitudes, or behavior in the millennial generation occur due to communication technology during a specific period, e.g., internet platforms with broad coverage that provides information sources (Syahputra, 2019). Hawkins & Mothersbaugh (2010) mentioned that cultures could affect one's behavior that triggers intentions, followed by subjective norms, which ultimately produce situationally influenced behaviors.

The social variable had an original sample value of -0.102, indicating that social factors negatively affected purchasing decisions. The t-statistic test demonstrated that $t\text{-calculation } 1.664 < t\text{-table } 1.992$, and thus, social factors did not affect purchasing decisions with a p-value of $0.095 < 0.100$. It was concluded that social factors did not affect purchasing decisions; hence, H2 was rejected. The study result showed that social factors did not affect purchasing decisions. A study supporting this result was conducted by Dewanto, Moniharapon, & Mandagie (2018), concluding that social factors did not affect purchasing decisions. The desire to buy counterfeit luxury goods is often influenced by information provided by workmates or friends. Besides illustrating customers' acceptability in receiving new information, it also shows that the purchasing desire is affected by social effects. This study contrasts results stating that social factors affect purchasing decisions (Adnan, 2018; Purwaningrum, 2020). Based on a survey in 2019 in Indonesia, teenage groups aged 17-20 and 21-30 had a high sentiment against social identity. A study by INTA revealed that when they weigh their financial capabilities with the appreciation of the brand as a work, they prefer the financial situation. The group's income may be a reason to buy counterfeit products, as about three in five respondents in Insights: Brands and Counterfeit Products acknowledged failing to afford the lifestyle they wanted. Regardless that many people purchase counterfeit goods, the study also revealed that these youth groups had a high appreciation for ideas and creativity. Seventy percent of respondents stated that intellectual property rights are as important as physical property rights. Meanwhile, 74% stated that purchasing genuine products is crucial (detiknews, 2019). This study showed that current teenage groups are not interested in purchasing counterfeit products, as their families have no previous experience purchasing them. Respondents perceived failure to show their role and status in society by using counterfeit products.

The psychological variable had a positive relationship with purchasing decisions, observed from the original sample value of 0.345. The t-statistic test generated $t\text{-calculation } 1.993 > t\text{-table } 1.992$, showing that psychological factors affected purchasing decisions with a significance level (p-value) of $0.047 < 0.100$. It concludes that psychological factors had a positive and significant relationship with purchasing decisions, and hence, H3 was accepted. The study result showed that psychological factors affected purchasing decisions. Community perception encourages purchasing counterfeit goods, although people are aware of the low quality and legal risks. Economic growth gave rise to a new middle class that also required a new lifestyle. Indonesia has a large middle-class population. Most of the population is the millennial generation, often characterized by having a consumptive, trendy lifestyle and wanting to experience many things, including fashion. However, the purchasing power of the millennial middle class is insufficient to buy luxury brands. To follow global trends, buying counterfeit goods to support their lifestyle and experience is a choice (Mayasari & Wijanarko, 2022). This study result is supported by Purwaningrum's (2020) study, stating that psychological factors affect purchasing decisions.

The personal variable testing against purchasing decisions generated an original sample value of 0.411. This number shows that the personal variable is positively related to purchasing decisions. Moreover, the t-statistic value revealed that $t\text{-calculation } 2.359 > t\text{-table } 1.992$. Therefore, it indicates that personal factors affected purchasing decisions with a significant value (p-value) of $0.019 < 0.100$. From this result, H4 was accepted. The study

showed that personal factors affected purchasing decisions. Previous studies stated that personal factors could improve purchasing decisions (Hudani, 2020; Adnan, 2018, Puwaningrum, 2020). Personal factors can improve customer purchasing decisions against a product. Age, occupation, economic situation, lifestyle, and personality are personal factors supporting purchasing decisions. Personal factors, particularly the lifestyle of teenagers, increase the consumption rate for counterfeit goods (Suwarti & Rokhmah, 2018). Despite imitations, respondents believed that using expensive branded products could show their social status. Based on the number of respondents by age, the age range of 17-20 years was the one mostly using counterfeit products. Millennials highly consider social status, which is commonly observed in the brand of fashion they wear. Hence, luxury fashion brands are a necessity for their current appearance. Based on Asia Luxury Index (2017), millennials do not have as much money as their predecessors. In acquiring the best quality fashion products, they usually buy secondhand branded goods at low prices, which are far more affordable than genuine ones (Dian, 2018).

Consumers' perceived risk had a negative influence on attitude and intention to purchase counterfeit outdoor products. Moreover, attitude towards buying counterfeit outdoor products, perceived behavioral control and subjective norm had positive impacts on purchase intention (Tseng, W, Y., Chiu, W., & Leng, H. K, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis results processed using Partial Least Square (PLS) from variables related to this study, a conclusion was drawn as follows: cultural factors affect purchasing decisions. The cultural factor indicators utilized were cultures, subcultures, and social classes. Meanwhile, the purchasing decision variable used indicators of issue/need recognition, information searching, alternative valuation, purchasing decision, and post-purchasing behavior.

Social factors do not affect purchasing decisions, meaning that the social variable had a low contribution to purchasing decisions. The social factor indicators utilized were reference groups, family, role, and status. Psychological factors affect purchasing decisions. The psychological factor indicators utilized were motivation, perception, and the learning process. Personal factors affect purchasing decisions, where the indicators utilized include occupation, lifestyle, personality, and self-concept. The main contribution of this research lies in understanding the impact of perceived quality, brand prestige, environment and perceived value on purchase intention, all of which ultimately lead to the purchase of foreign brands (Bjekić, R., Strugar Jelača, M., Berber, N., & Aleksić, M, 2021).

Given the strong competition between domestic and foreign brands and among foreign brands themselves, in the large number of products and services in each country, it is very important to understand consumer attitudes and preferences when choosing a brand. in the buying process. For managers of foreign companies, it is very important to understand how consumers perceive the quality, value and prestige of foreign brands, and how these perceptions influence their decisions to buy foreign brands (Tomašević, D., Gašević, D., & Vranješ, M, 2022). The research that has been done also has some limitations. First, the number of factors included in the research model is limited. Other factors that influence purchasing decisions can be found in the literature, and further variables should be included in future research to better understand consumer characteristics. Second, it is important to increase the sample size, to obtain a more uniform age structure of the respondents, and then examine whether in this case there are statistically significant differences in the purchase of counterfeit products between different age groups.

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